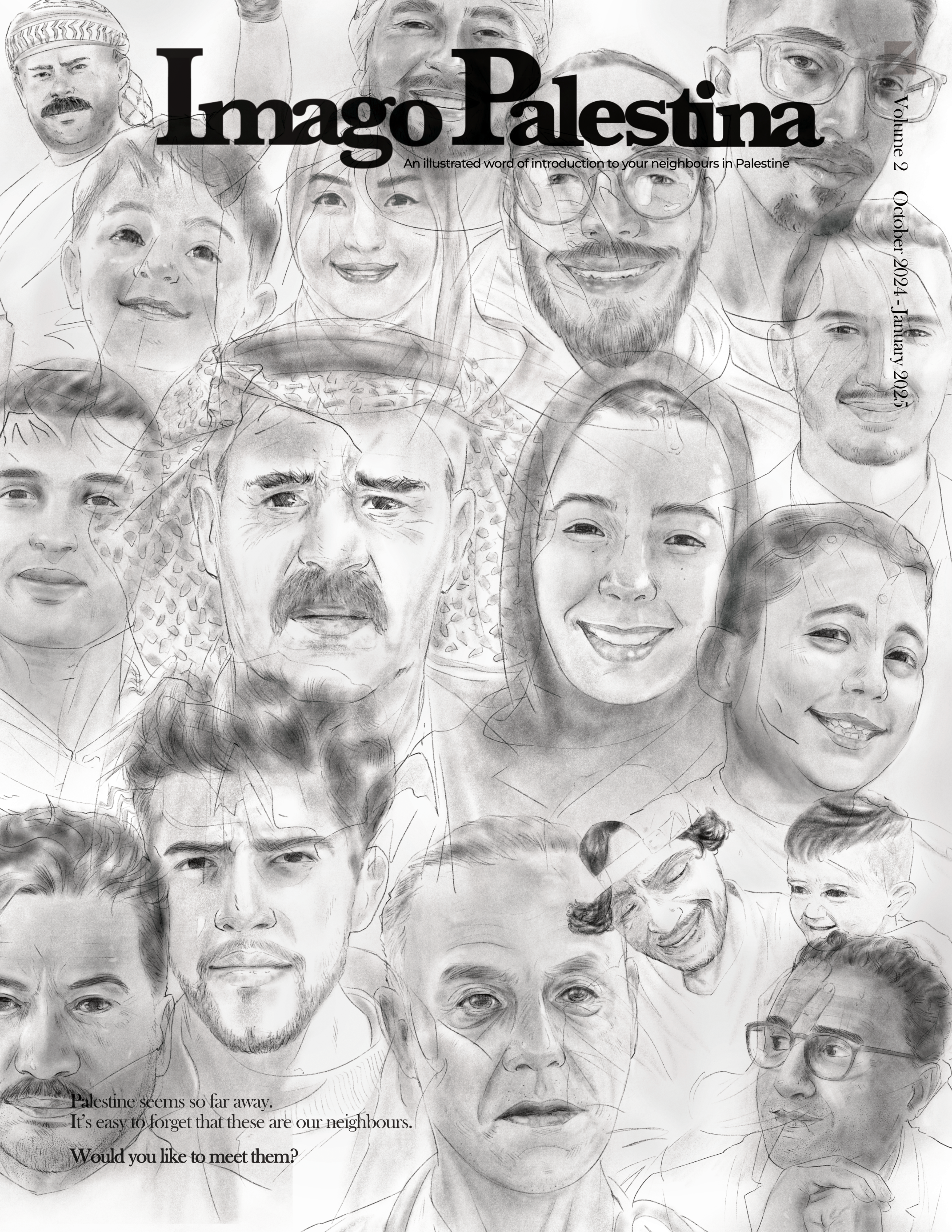
Imago Palestina

An illustrated word of introduction to your neighbours in Palestine

Volume 2 October 2024 - January 2025



Palestine seems so far away.
It’s easy to forget that these are our neighbours.

Would you like to meet them?

Photo by Rabie
Hussein of Gaza

Imago Palestina, Vol. 2
(October 2024—January 2025)

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All text written by Stephan "Sven" Goslinski, except "Abdalrahman, Rabie, and Watermelon Buddies," written by Candice Rozario. All illustrations by Stephan "Sven" Goslinski, with no intent to own, infringe upon, or in any other way disrespect these beautiful faces or the neighbours they belong to.

This volume discusses the violent realities of genocide and occupation, including torture and the killing of people of all ages. If you have experienced torture, please read the section on Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya with additional caution.

Imago Palestina was drawn, written, and printed on lands that were taken through coercion and violence from the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, and Mississauga nations. This same colonialism, still alive and well here on Turtle Island, is also what has been deployed against our neighbours in Palestine for the last 76 years, most blatantly now. As we meet our neighbours in Palestine, let us remember that the borders between "here" and "there" are immaterial to our collective responsibility to each other.

Imago Palestina is written in solidarity with the people of Palestine and with all Indigenous people who face oppression, wherever they may reside. It is written in the express goal of both Palestinian freedom and our collective freedom from forces of racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, militarism, patriarchy, and all ideologies that seek to oppress, exploit, and divide us. None of us are free until all of us are free, and safety can only come from solidarity.

We need to take care of each other.

I lift my eyes up
where does my
help come from?

In the first volume of this magazine, I began the introduction by talking about the time Jesus was asked "who is my neighbour?" I talked about the Good Samaritan—a story I'm sure we're all at least somewhat familiar with—and how many familiarities there are between that story and the story we've been seeing play out for over 100 years between ourselves and the people of Palestine. So many of the same barriers stand in both cases: barriers of distance, of perceived political or cultural, or even racial, differences. When Jesus shows us an example of someone recognizing their neighbour despite all those barriers, I hope we are inspired to do the same thing.

But then what?

Perhaps many of us have come to this point already. We are standing on the side of the road, seeing our neighbour bloodied at our feet. We look to the donkey we rode in on—space only for one. We look to the road ahead of us—long, tiring, and unfamiliar. We look to our coin purse—lighter than we'd like.

We look back down to our neighbour.

What does the Lord require of you?

For over 17 months now, Israel has been laying siege to the people of Gaza, Palestine. The unrelenting bombing, ground invasion, and starvation campaign has forced more than 2 million people from their homes, wounded hundreds of thousands, and killed more than 50 000 Palestinians—a fog of war figure which public health scholars, such as those at the Lancet, estimate is several multiples short of the actual number. Throughout this time, Israeli violence, both by military forces and government-armed settlers, has increased dramatically in the occupied West Bank, eventually escalating to the point where the Israeli military invaded Jenin and multiple other northern towns, forcibly expelling over 40 000 Palestinians and killing hundreds. Around the world, leading human rights groups (such as Amnesty International), scholars, and the United Nations recognize that Israel's persistent violence amounts to genocide.

That is a very hard word to hear, and these are very hard facts to grapple with. We don't want to believe that such things are possible, for so long, with the support of nations we ourselves may be part of. We don't want to believe that, perhaps, we have acted in ways that allowed for this evil to happen—or worse, that actions we don't even think about, like where we spend our money, may be fuelling it. We don't want to believe that our inaction—our fearful hesitation, our abdication of responsibility, our looking away—has paved this road.

I know your heart is hurting, as you look at your neighbour, beaten and bloody. I know you think you can't help, or you shouldn't. I know you want to say, "someone else will come along." "This is someone else's responsibility." I did too.

So I'll ask you what a still, small voice asked me 17 months ago—what I ask myself every morning.

"What does the Lord require of you?"

In this magazine, you'll get the opportunity to meet some of your neighbours in Palestine. I know for a lot of us, Palestine—also known as the Holy Land—might feel very far away. We are raised on stories of people who walked the streets of Bethlehem or rested by the edge of the Jordan, but it can be difficult to bridge the image we have from 2000 years ago to the reality our neighbours embody today. I hope that by reading the 19 "words of introduction" collected in this volume that some of that distance will begin to fade away.

All of these profiles were originally posted on ImagoPalestina.Substack.com, where I introduce one of our neighbours each week. While each has been lightly edited from its original publication for this new printing, they remain consistent to the spirit of the original posts. The most notable change is this: for every entry I publish online, I include a selection of prayer requests and a list of links to more information; in this print version, you can find prayer requests and more information in the appendices at the end of the volume. Any links that would have been embedded in the digital version are now marked with footnotes, corresponding by number to that neighbour's section in the *More Information* appendix at the end of the volume. All original posts are still hosted on ImagoPalestina.Substack.com, and I'd encourage you to subscribe so you can receive new updates as they come out, delivered directly to your email inbox.

As you meet your Palestinian neighbours, whether in the following pages, through the weekly emails, or out in the world, I encourage you to keep that question from Micah 6:8 in your mind. When we are stopped in our path by injustice, will we keep walking? When we feel our neighbours' scars, will we draw back our hands? When we see the image of God crushed and twisted by empire, greed, and power, will we stay silent? Will I? Will you?

There will always be good reasons to pass on by in silence. But I don't think God calls us to good reason. God calls us to faith, and to courage, and most of all to an overwhelming, discomforting, revolutionary love. It's a love that asks something from us, not as a price but as a result. It's a love that *requires*.

What does Love require of you?

In hope and solidarity,

Sam

First published August 9, 2024

Awdah Al-Hathaleen

Teacher

"In Umm al-Khair, no one is in a safe place."
- Awdah writing for +972 Magazine

When I was about four, I learned a piece of wisdom from a VBS song that we sang under the glow of an overhead projector in the sanctuary of my church on a warm August afternoon: the wise man builds his house upon the rock where the waves won't wash it down. This is a metaphor, of course, for building your life on a strong foundation, i.e. Jesus' teachings, and in this metaphor, the one who builds his life—his house—on unstable foundations—on sand—is the fool. I'm going to tell you a story and I want you to spot the fool for me.

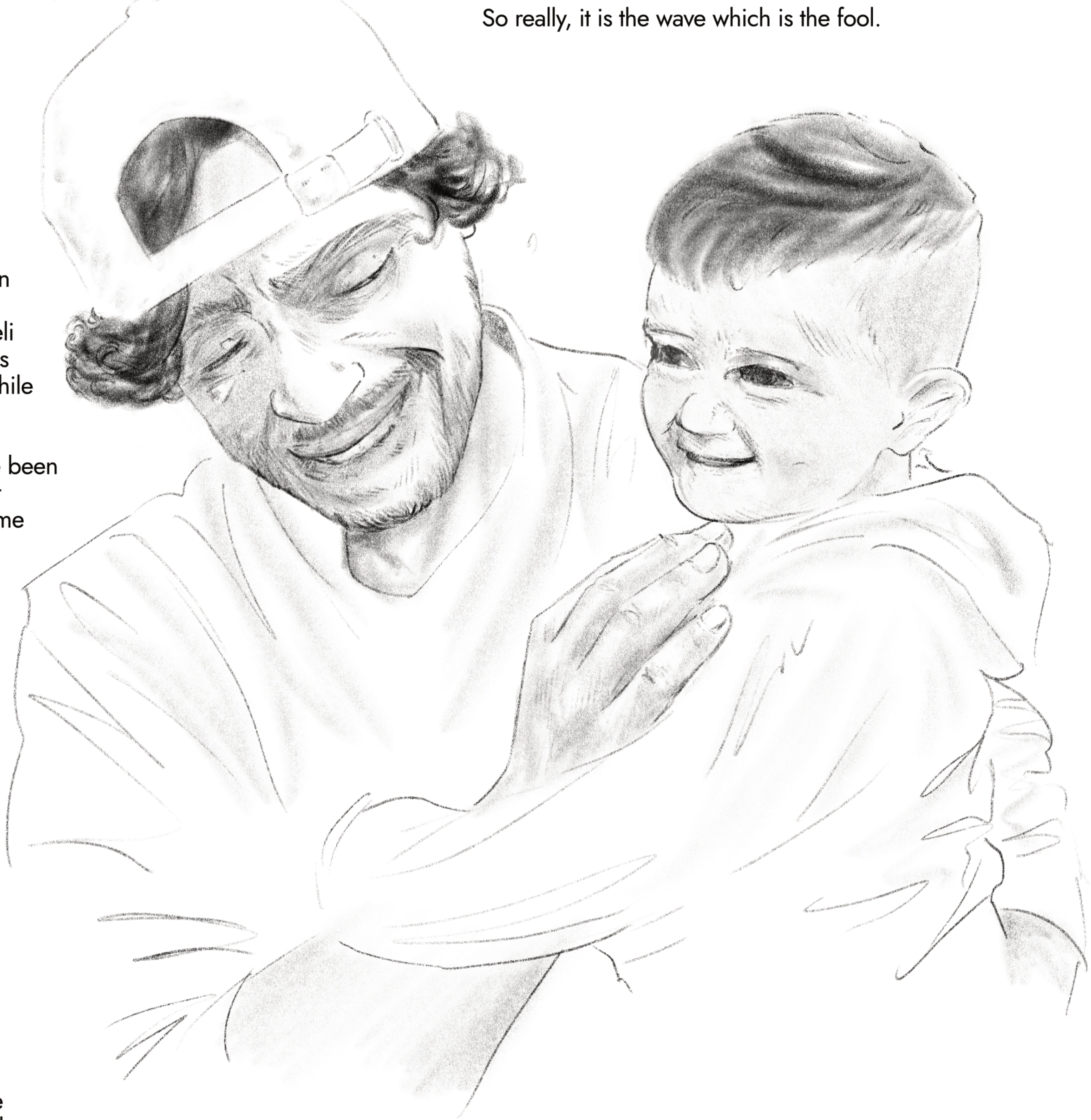
Awdah Al-Hathaleen is a 28 year old teacher in Umm al-Khair, a community in Masafer Yatta, South Hebron Hills, in the West Bank. A couple weeks ago, he had to watch as Israel bulldozed ten homes in his community, leaving 38 people, including his brother and sister, homeless. This isn't a new occurrence—Awdah and his brother are both activists who challenge and document home demolitions, and Awdah has been forced to watch bulldozers roll through his community since he was thirteen—and as long as the occupation continues, so will home demolitions.

You see, while Palestinians like Awdah and his family have lived on this land for generations, under Israel's illegal occupation, the Israeli administration systematically denies building permits to Palestinians (while still issuing permits to illegal Israeli settlements). So when Palestinian residents (who, I remind you, have been there for generations) rebuild their homes, Israel has the power to come and knock them down all over again whenever they wish (usually when settlers from Israel want to expand into these lands). At four years old, Awdah's son is learning that his safety—his sanctuary—is built on the shifting sands of the occupation's cruelty.

So who is the fool? I know many who would say it's Awdah and his community—say that if they don't have the permits, they shouldn't build, and shouldn't be surprised when the wave of administrative force tears their houses down. It's the same argument you hear to support the violent evictions of unhoused peoples' encampments that we see across Canada and the US. To those people, I don't really know what to say except: if you really think that, you're the fool. If you see a ruling class drawing laws and policy directly around their interests, if you see the only effect is driving people from their homes, destroying their possessions, and meeting them with constant violence, just for the crime of wanting to live another day, and you see in that the rule of law working as intended, then I question what foundation you're standing on right now.

But I have to hope that, if you're reading this, you're not that fool. You know that, when Jesus talked about a firm foundation, he was referring to the kingdom promise he embodied, of communities based in respect for human dignity, meeting each others' needs, and tearing down the systems that divide us. That's why "End the Occupation" is a rallying cry: because the occupation is no foundation. That life remains is a testament to the people of Palestine, who know that their home is not like those shifting sands which now occupy it. Like the olive tree, they remain rooted in steadfastness, in their communities, in resistance to all that tries to remove them from this home.

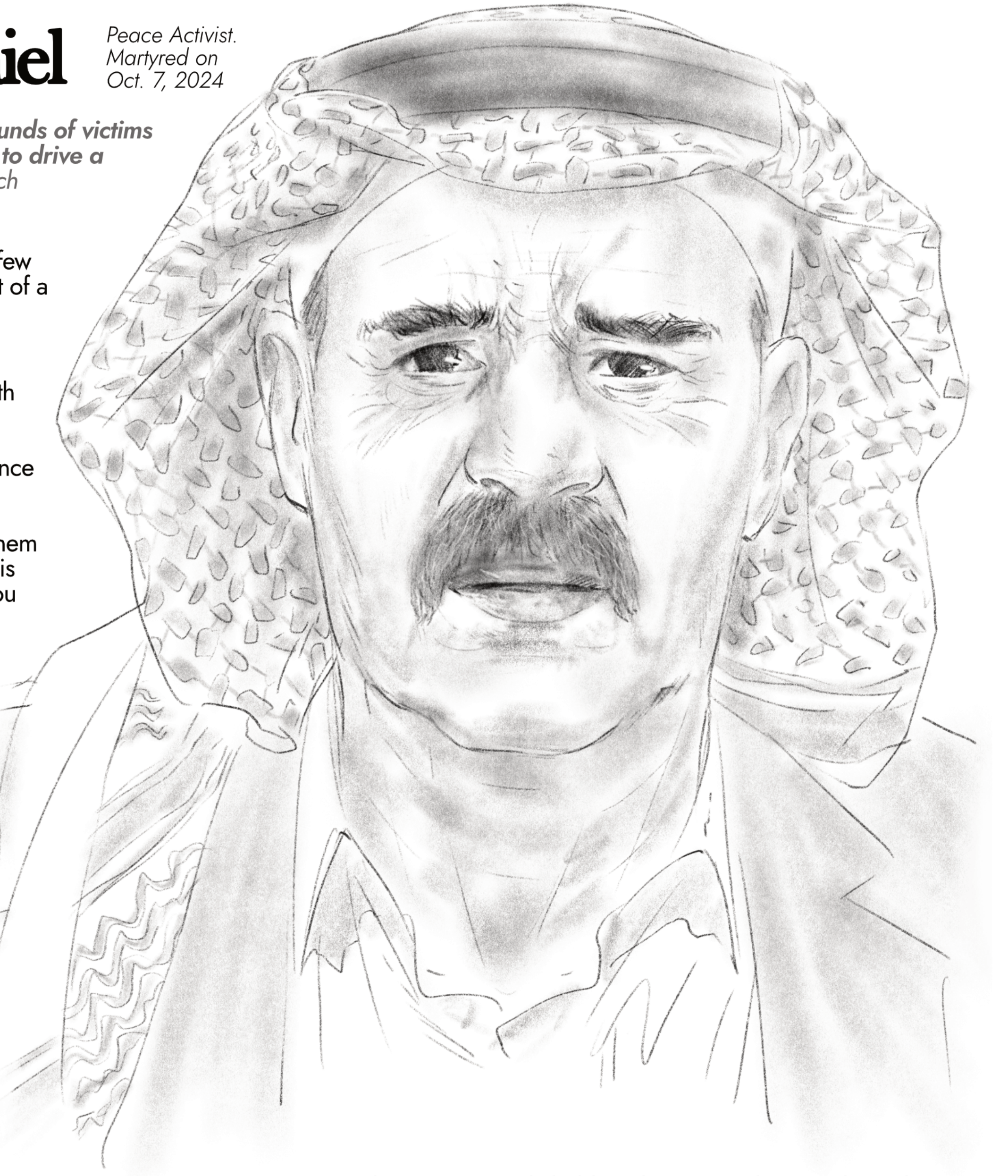
So really, it is the wave which is the fool.



First published October 11, 2024

Ziad Abu Helaiel

Peace Activist.
Martyred on
Oct. 7, 2024



> ***"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."*** *- Rev. Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

I only learned about today's neighbour a few days ago, but he's already becoming a bit of a personal hero to me. Let me tell you why.

Ziad Abu Helaiel was a 66 year old Palestinian activist in the city of Dura, south of Hebron in the West Bank. He was beloved in his community and was well known for his non-violent tactics of resistance against the occupation: literally standing between his loved ones and the heavily armed Israeli soldiers who sought to do them harm. In 2015, video of him doing just this spread around the world—I encourage you to watch the video, embedded in the first of my sources[1], to see this courageous man literally place his body in the line of fire of at least half a dozen soldiers, gas canisters hurtling out of their grenade launchers. You can see moments where he flinches as they pivot and fire over his shoulder, but he still keeps his hands raised.

I'm writing about Ziad in the past tense because on October 7th, 2024, he was killed by the Israeli military. Around 3am, soldiers raided his home with the goal of abducting his son, and just like he'd done many times before, he placed his body between his loved ones and the military might that sought to do them harm. He was beaten, shoved into a metal door, and was pronounced dead of his injuries when paramedics delivered him to the nearby hospital.

I think we could all learn from Ziad's resistance, and his sacrifice. I believe a Christian's place lies squarely between the forces of injustice and the bodies of our neighbours. It's what Christ demonstrated when the forces of empire nailed him to the cross and he forgave even his oppressors, taking the effects of sin on himself rather than us—it's the willingness to sacrifice both to protect the oppressed and expose the violence of the powerful.

I'm compelled by my faith to prefer the ways of non-violence, of beating the sword into the ploughshare, but we can never delude ourselves into thinking that non-violent resistance is passive. When we stand up to oppressive systems, there is always violence in the equation. The choice of non-violent resistance is to allow the oppressor's violence to fall on us so that it won't fall on others, to do so in solidarity so the brunt of the pain is shared, to disrupt the processes of violence with our bodies, and to use this all to reveal the violence intrinsic to the system as it breaks on our unyielding shores.

It's a powerful resistance to get in the way, to stand firm and say, "this far, no further." It's the resistance of the people of Gaza who, despite a full year of assaults, refuse to leave their homes to be paved over for settlers. It's the resistance of the Irish UN peacekeepers currently holding their ground as Israel invades Lebanon, despite being fired on by Israel.[2] It's the resistance of Alice Kisiya[3] and her family, who did actually build their church in Al Makhrour, only for the Israeli military to tear it down the next day.[4] It's the quiet, innate resistance of Muhammad Bhar, who would not move even when Israeli soldiers set their dog upon him.[5]

I called this type of resistance a choice earlier, but in Palestine, it isn't really, at least not the way it is for us. Palestinians don't have the option of sitting out conflict. Their existence in the land is antithetical to Israel's goals—the violence is coming one way or another. Their existence is resistance, and they will continue to resist, in this form or others, until Israel's oppressive systems are dismantled. We can't let the sacrifices demanded from them be in vain. It's our responsibility to draw courage from neighbours like Ziad and make the choice to join them: to stand in the way.

**Note: In finding the correct wording of this Bonhoeffer quote, I've discovered that there is no actual source for it. There are sourced quotations that are similar, but I can't find this exact one. Nevertheless, I think it has survived for a good reason, namely that it definitely seems in keeping with his theology and politics. Certainly enough so, in my mind, for me to use it here.*

First published October 16, 2024

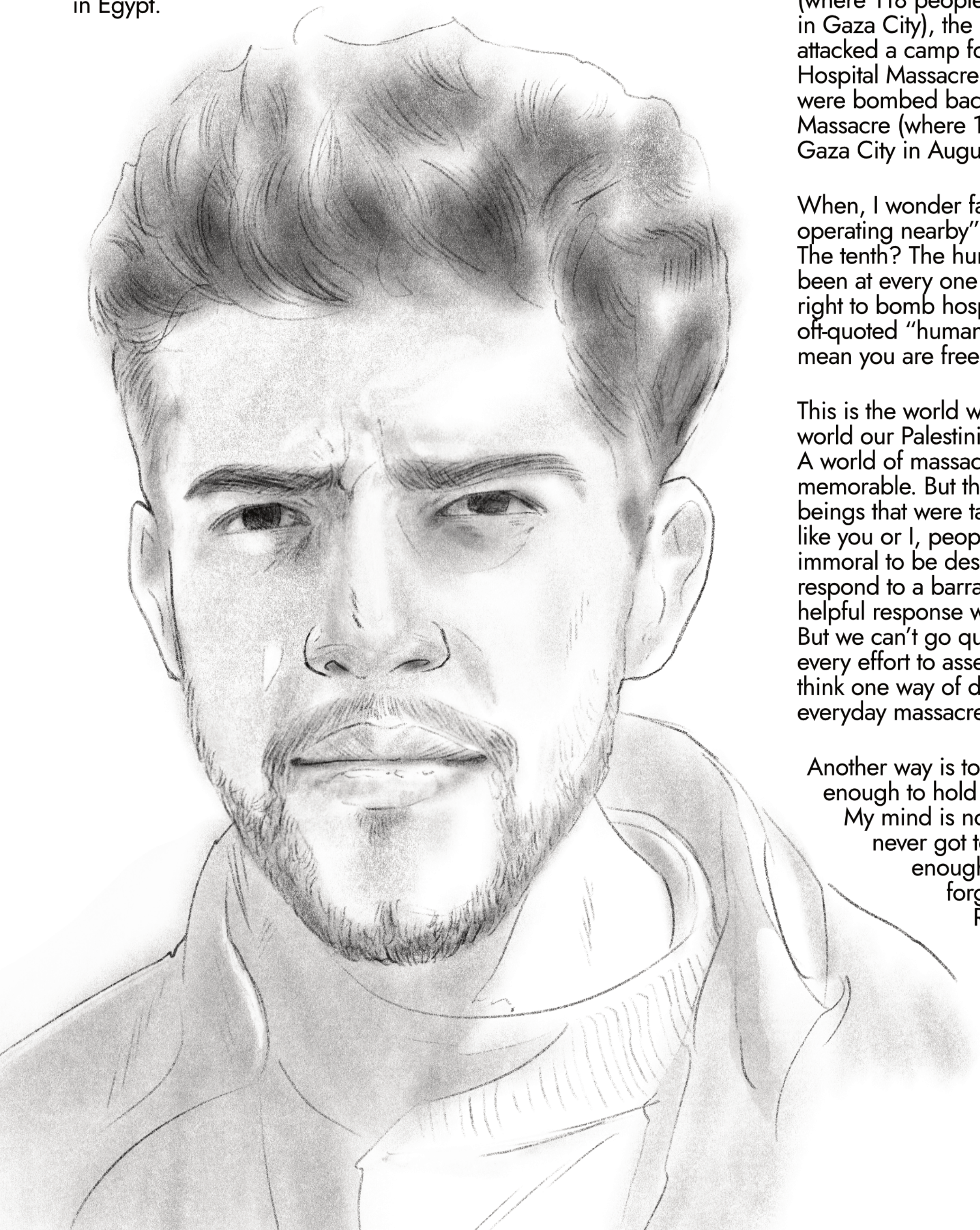
Sha'ban Al-Dalou

Software Engineering Student. Martyered on October 14, 2024

"In Gaza dreams go to die...I used to have big dreams but the war has ruined them." *- Sha'ban Al-Dalou in his GoFundMe*

This is Sha'ban Al-Dalou (also known as Sha'ban Ahmed, using patrilineal naming), a 19 year old software engineering student who began his second year of studies in September 2023 at Al-Azhar University in Gaza City. He'd been a very successful student in the previous year, earning a GPA of 93.18% which ranked him in the top ten among his classmates.

When Israel began its bombardment of Gaza, Sha'ban's path changed forever; within the first month, his university had been destroyed by Israeli air strikes. He and his family of 7—Sha'ban, his parents (Ahmed and Alaa), his two younger brothers (Mohammed, 16, and Abdelrahman, 10), and his two younger sisters (Farah, 18, and Rahaf, 13)—were displaced five times over the course of the year, eventually ending up in a refugee encampment at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir el-Balah (central Gaza). Despite the loss of their home, their constant displacement, and ongoing illness and starvation, Sha'ban did his best to continue his studies virtually using mobile data, and set up a GoFundMe fundraiser to help him and his family start a new life in Egypt.



Early in the morning on Monday, October 14, the Israeli military attacked the Al-Aqsa Hospital encampment, causing flames to erupt throughout the labyrinth of polyester and canvas. Sha'ban, who only a few days ago had been injured in an attack on a mosque that killed 20, was hooked up to an IV for treatment when the fires ripped through. In a heartbreaking video shared by onlookers, Sha'ban burned to death in his makeshift hospital bed, still tethered by the IV meant to give him life. His mother, Alaa, died with him, as well as at least two others who haven't been identified. He is survived by his brother Mohammed, who watched him die but was unable to help, as well as his father and at least one sister who are in different hospitals.

How many massacres of our neighbours in Palestine can you remember from the last year? Offhand, I can think of two: the Al-Shifa Hospital massacre from November and the Al-Mawasi beach massacre of this past September. It seems, however, that every other day, I turn on my phone and see more of the same: more rubble, more tents on fire, more of my neighbours bleeding into the soil. I look back down the list and I remember the Nuiserat Massacre (when Israeli forces used the US-built "humanitarian pier" as a trojan horse to kill 274 people), the Flour Massacre (where 118 people were killed waiting in line for humanitarian aid in Gaza City), the Rafah Tent Massacre (one of the *first* times Israel attacked a camp for displaced people in a safe zone), the Al-Ahli Hospital Massacre (where 500 people sheltering in the hospital were bombed back in October), and the Al-Tabin School Massacre (where 100 people were burned beyond recognition in Gaza City in August).

When, I wonder facetiously, does the pat excuse that "Hamas was operating nearby" ring flat? After the first massacre? The second? The tenth? The hundredth? I'd argue that *even if* fighters had been at every one of these locations, that does not give Israel the right to bomb hospitals, schools, and designated safe zones. The oft-quoted "human shield" defense, if accurate at all, does not mean you are free to kill the shield as well.

This is the world we've been living in for the past year. This is the world our Palestinian neighbours have been living and dying in. A world of massacres so constant they cease to seem even that memorable. But they should be, or at least the unique human beings that were taken from us in this senseless slaughter—people like you or I, people with dreams—should be. should be. Is it immoral to be desensitized? We don't choose how our brains' respond to a barrage of suffering, and I don't think shame is a helpful response when our memories or nervous systems fail us. But we can't go quietly. We need to meet this desensitization with every effort to assert that our neighbours are *not* just numbers. I think one way of doing that is precisely by holding up a year of everyday massacres and saying *this is not normal*.

Another way is to hold what comes to us. My arms are not wide
enough to hold each of our neighbours who has been killed.
My mind is not wide enough to hold all the dreams they
never got to see. Neither is yours. But we are wide
enough for some of them. Don't forget Sha'ban. Don't
forget his dreams, and why they were taken.
Remember him when you fight for the dreams
of all our neighbours who still have a chance.

First published October 23, 2024

Mahasen Al-Khatib

Artist. Martyred on October 18, 2024

> ***"There's this illustrator in Gaza who was making portraits of Palestinians, like you are. She was killed sometime within the last 16 hours."***
>
> *- the message from a friend which introduced me to Mahasen*

I usually try to say something moving or poignant about each neighbour I introduce. I don't know how well my words will serve me today.

Last week, on Friday, October 18th, 32 year old Mahasen Al-Khatib was killed by an Israeli airstrike on the Jabalia refugee camp, as part of Israel's ongoing extermination of northern Gaza. The airstrike also killed her five remaining family members who were taking refuge with her: her mother, her sister Mai, her brothers Mohammed and Amin, and her sister-in-law, Iman.

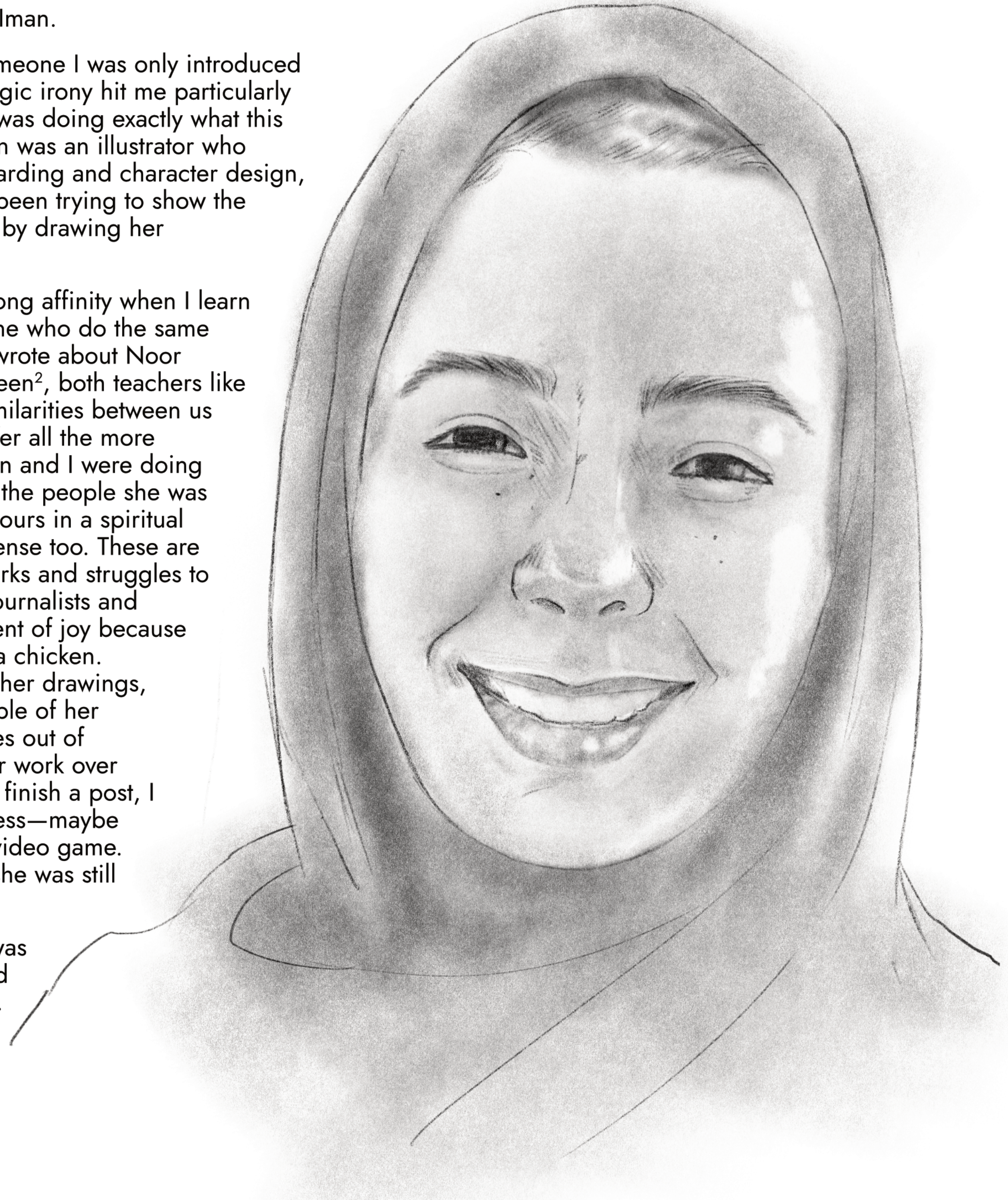
Once again, Mahasen is someone I was only introduced to by her death, and that tragic irony hit me particularly hard this time because she was doing exactly what this project is all about. Mahasen was an illustrator who worked primarily in storyboarding and character design, but for the past year, she'd been trying to show the world the true face of Gaza by drawing her neighbours.

I often feel a particularly strong affinity when I learn about neighbours in Palestine who do the same work that I do—like when I wrote about Noor Nassar[1] or Awdah Al-Hathaleen[2], both teachers like me—largely because the similarities between us make the injustices they suffer all the more obvious. On paper, Mahasen and I were doing the same thing, but for her, the people she was drawing weren't just neighbours in a spiritual sense, but in a very literal sense too. These are the people she lives and works and struggles to survive with—doctors and journalists and children who found a moment of joy because of a memorization book or a chicken. Moreover, when she makes her drawings, she does so among the rubble of her community, scraping charges out of batteries, and uploading her work over erratic mobile data. When I finish a post, I take some time to decompress—maybe buy some dinner or play a video game. When she finished a post, she was still living under constant siege.

In her last post before she was killed, she and I even shared a subject: Sha'ban Al-Dalou. But for her, Sha'ban's murder wasn't something to be reflected on from afar, but rather a real example of what Israel was doing to her community and what it would do to her only hours later.

As I said at the outset, I don't know how well my words are serving me today. I don't have a compelling narrative to connect Mahasen to, nor a rousing call to action aside from the usual "enough is enough." I'm just sad that she's gone. I just hope my art honours her as much as hers honoured others.

> ***"Together, we can affirm that art is more than expression; it is a lifeline that connects us and enlightens even the darkest moments."***
>
> *- Mahasen Al-Khatib, from her GoFundMe*

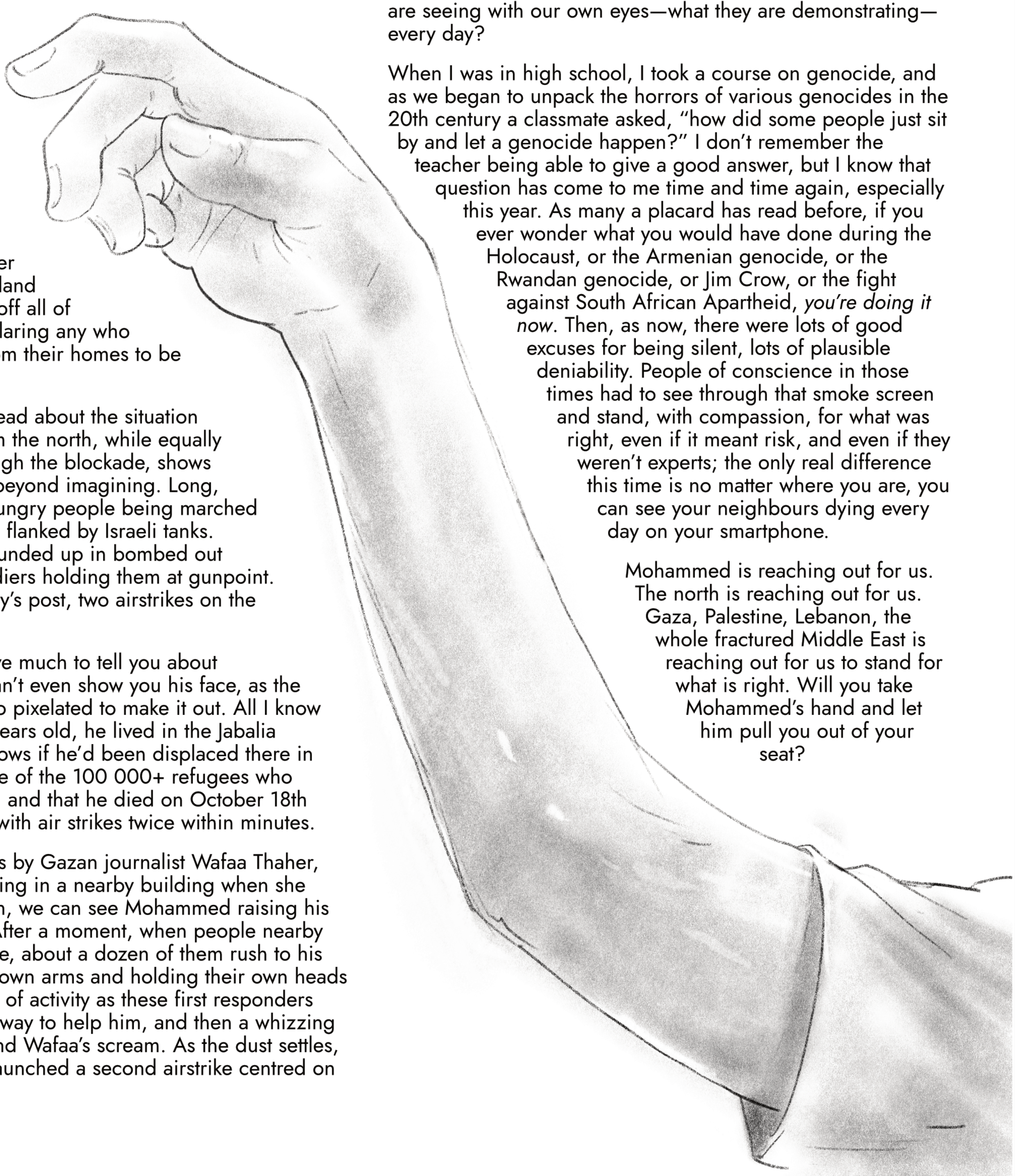


First published October 30, 2024

Mohammed Salem

13 year old. Martyred on October 18, 2024.

"He's in pieces. He's in pieces. Why did they strike him? Why?" *- Wafaa Thaher*



I'm sorry to tell you the situation for our neighbours in northern Gaza has only gotten worse.

While media is being blockaded from the north, what little news journalists on the ground are able to get out is harrowing. There are multiple reports of Israeli forces attacking refuge centres and firing on civilians even as they try to evacuate, even while some literally wave white flags. The hospitals in the area have been shut down, many of their staff taken hostage by the Israeli army, and even the Gaza Civil Defense workers (first responders tasked with rescuing people from rubble, fighting fires, and maintaining some semblance of order) have been barred from any activity, with Israel actually destroying their aid vehicles to seal the deal. Moreover, all evidence so far maps onto the so-called "General's Plan," a proposed plan by former Israeli general Giora Eiland which involves closing off all of northern Gaza and declaring any who refuse to be pushed from their homes to be combatants.

You don't just have to read about the situation though, as footage from the north, while equally difficult to get out through the blockade, shows scenes that are almost beyond imagining. Long, trailing lines of tired, hungry people being marched away from their homes, flanked by Israeli tanks. Hundreds of people rounded up in bombed out buildings by Israeli soldiers holding them at gunpoint. And the subject of today's post, two airstrikes on the same child.

Once again, I don't have much to tell you about Mohammed Salem. I can't even show you his face, as the video of his death is too pixelated to make it out. All I know is that he was thirteen years old, he lived in the Jabalia Refugee camp (who knows if he'd been displaced there in the past year or was one of the 100 000+ refugees who already called it home), and that he died on October 18th when Israel struck him with air strikes twice within minutes.

In footage brought to us by Gazan journalist Wafaa Thaher, who herself was sheltering in a nearby building when she heard the first explosion, we can see Mohammed raising his arm, waving for help. After a moment, when people nearby realize that he's still alive, about a dozen of them rush to his aid, some raising their own arms and holding their own heads in grief. There's a flurry of activity as these first responders seem to search for any way to help him, and then a whizzing sound, an explosion, and Wafaa's scream. As the dust settles, we can see that Israel launched a second airstrike centred on Mohammed's position, and that many of those trying to help him were hit.

The Palestinian Red Crescent later announced that Mohammed had died from his wounds, as had a 14-year old boy who had tried to help him, but whose feet were severed in the second blast. Over 20 others were wounded.

To me, this is as unequivocal as it gets. In her video Wafaa cries "why did they strike him?" and there can be no good answer to that question. Israeli officials, when asked, said that Israel "is working to dismantle the military and administrative capabilities of Hamas" and takes "possible precautions to reduce harm to civilians." When are we going to stop accepting such bald-faced lies rather than believing what we are seeing with our own eyes—what they are demonstrating—every day?

When I was in high school, I took a course on genocide, and as we began to unpack the horrors of various genocides in the 20th century a classmate asked, "how did some people just sit by and let a genocide happen?" I don't remember the teacher being able to give a good answer, but I know that question has come to me time and time again, especially this year. As many a placard has read before, if you ever wonder what you would have done during the Holocaust, or the Armenian genocide, or the Rwandan genocide, or Jim Crow, or the fight against South African Apartheid, *you're doing it now*. Then, as now, there were lots of good excuses for being silent, lots of plausible deniability. People of conscience in those times had to see through that smoke screen and stand, with compassion, for what was right, even if it meant risk, and even if they weren't experts; the only real difference this time is no matter where you are, you can see your neighbours dying every day on your smartphone.

Mohammed is reaching out for us. The north is reaching out for us. Gaza, Palestine, Lebanon, the whole fractured Middle East is reaching out for us to stand for what is right. Will you take Mohammed's hand and let him pull you out of your seat?

First published October 21, 2024

Rest in Power, Yousef Abu Rabea

Today, our neighbour, Yousef Abu Rabea, who we first met in “Yousef & Leena of Thamra” was killed by the Israeli military.

You may remember Yousef as one of the founders of the northern Gaza-based aid organization, Thamra, which was dedicated to fighting Israel’s imposed starvation and destruction of Palestinian food crops by growing and distributing seedlings. Yousef was a farmer from a long family of farmers whose yearly yields of strawberries—”red gold”—and other crops were crushed this year by Israel’s assault on Gaza. Returning briefly to his now destroyed family fields in Beit Lahia, Yousef and his brothers rescued some seeds which he would then use to begin the Thamra initiative.

Yousef’s death was reported by Bisan Owda, likely another familiar name to Imago Palestina readers. I’ve linked Bisan’s video in the More Information section, and I’d highly encourage you watch it. She makes a point of situating Yousef’s murder within the ongoing ethnic cleansing taking place in the north of Gaza. For two weeks now, Israeli troops have been killing civilians daily in northern Gaza, razing civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, and blocking all humanitarian aid from entering the area. All evidence suggests an attempt to permanently remove Palestinians from northern Gaza and annex the land for settlement.

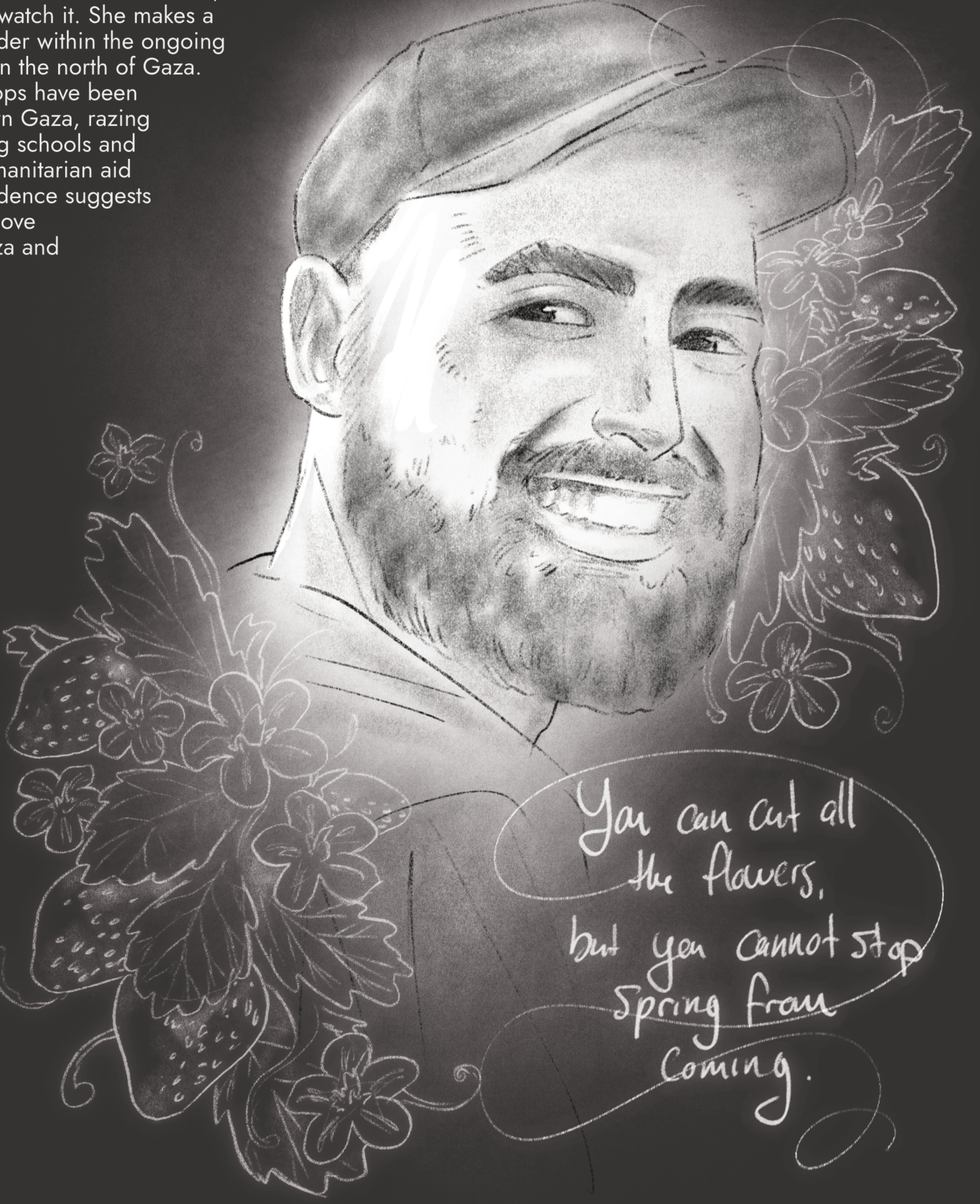
When I first introduced you to Yousef, I wrote:

“Thamra’s urban farming initiative is about refusing to be uprooted from the land that has always nurtured their communities. It’s also about refusing to give up on nurturing the land in return, even amidst abject destruction and with every possibility that one airstrike could destroy days of work. Even in the midst of death, Gazans are dedicated to life, even if it’s one seedling at a time.”

Right now, we’re seeing Israel ripping our neighbours and everything they have planted out of the soils of northern Gaza. When, like Yousef, they remain firmly rooted, Israel has taken this as consent to murder them.

I considered starting this message saying, “it was only a matter of time,” as in, “it was only a matter of time before I had to give you the news that one of our neighbours had been killed.” But that’s a lie. Yousef is dead not because of a force of nature or some predestined trajectory, but because human beings made that choice. Human beings, with power and influence, decided that other human beings with less power do not have the right to exist, at least not as much of a right as nations have to expand their borders, maintain alliances, and earn money. I cannot say it loudly enough that this is not an “out of control” scenario. The foot is still firmly on the gas pedal—the US is still sending weapons to Israel—and there are so many things we can do to hit the brakes.

It does not have to be this way.


You can cut all the flowers, but you cannot stop Spring from coming.

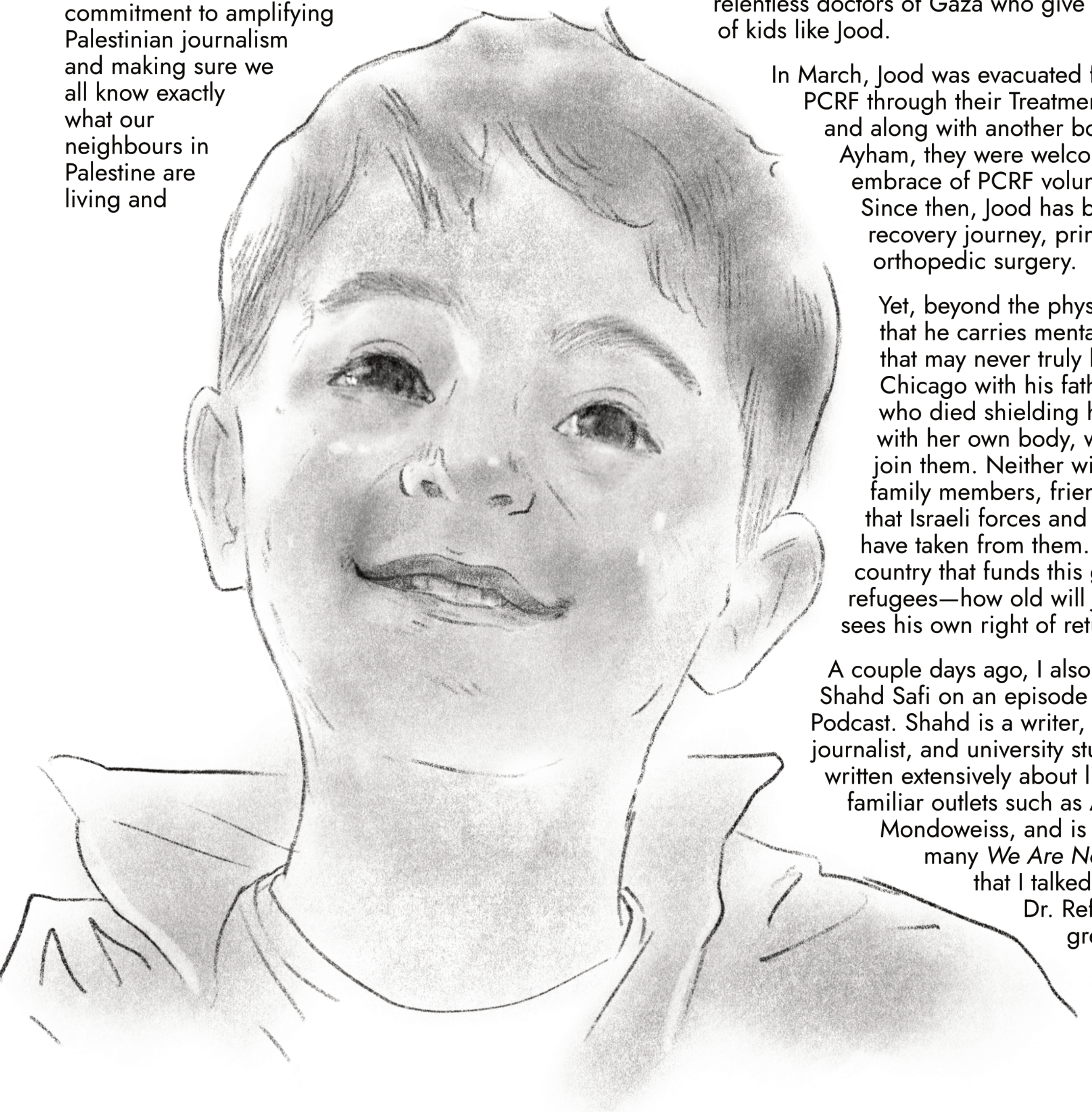
First published October 19, 2024

Jood Damo, Shahd Safi, and the Survivors

> ***"Do you feel like you survived?***
>
> ***"Yes, I do. I definitely survived the genocide, but did I survive the occupation? No, I did not."***
>
> *- Shahd Safi, responding to Ilana Levinson (first line) on the Unsettled Podcast*

These days, it's not often something on my news feed actually makes me smile. It's even rarer that I see something that I *want* to share, not because the world needs to bear witness, but because I genuinely think it'll make someone's day better. But that happened today.

Folks who've been reading Imago Palestina since the beginning will remember that one of the first neighbours I introduced was Gazan photojournalist Motaz Azaiza. Motaz has been one of the world's most steadfast eyes into Gaza, even after he and his family were able to escape the genocide in January, through his stalwart commitment to amplifying Palestinian journalism and making sure we all know exactly what our neighbours in Palestine are living and dying through. He's shared many heartbreaking images, one particularly striking being that of an injured two year old, screaming in a puddle of his own blood, on the floor of a besieged hospital. This photograph, and the accompanying video of Motaz reporting on the Israeli air strike which injured the child while doctors tried desperately to save his life, swept across our phone screens almost a year ago, in late December, and proved to be a clear example of the war Israel was waging against Gaza's children.



Today, I got to see that child, Jood Damo, laughing on Motaz's shoulders, safe and sound in a Chicago suburb.

This story, which could have gone down the all too familiar path of heartbreak, was redirected through the tireless effort of the Palestine Children's Relief Fund (PCRF), their supporters around the world, and teams of medical professionals—including, of course, those relentless doctors of Gaza who give their all for the sake of kids like Jood.

In March, Jood was evacuated from Gaza by the PCRF through their Treatment Abroad Program, and along with another boy, 13 year old Ayham, they were welcomed by the warm embrace of PCRF volunteers in Chicago. Since then, Jood has been on a long recovery journey, primarily focused on orthopedic surgery.

Yet, beyond the physical scars, we know that he carries mental and social scars that may never truly heal. He's in Chicago with his father, but his mother, who died shielding him from the blast with her own body, will never be able to join them. Neither will the many other family members, friends, and neighbours that Israeli forces and Western weapons have taken from them. And now, in the country that funds this genocide, they are refugees—how old will Jood be before he sees his own right of return?

A couple days ago, I also heard the story of Shahd Safi on an episode of the Unsettled Podcast. Shahd is a writer, translator, freelance journalist, and university student who has written extensively about life in Gaza for familiar outlets such as Al Jazeera and Mondoweiss, and is also one of the many *We Are Not Numbers* writers that I talked about in my post on Dr. Refaat Alareer.[1] (She's a great writer, and you should do yourself the favour of reading some of her work after you read this. Her poetry is especially good in my opinion.)

The team at Unsettled interviewed her back in October 2023, about conditions inside Gaza after Israel began cutting off food, water, electricity, and Internet access. Now, however, she was able to speak to them from her dorm room in the US, where she's working to earn a bachelor's degree in human rights and written arts. Her new situation has come at the end of a long, twisting journey that saw her and her family struggle for months under the Israeli assault before finally, barely, securing their escape through the support of international GoFundMe donors and Shahd's own gumption.

The bittersweet way Shahd talks about her family's process of evacuating Gaza through levels of Egyptian bureaucratic corruption, finding their freedom and enjoying things their new neighbours in Cairo and Giza took for granted (like space to move, or 24 hours of electricity), facing bitter xenophobia from some of these same neighbours, and eventually being invited to study in the US, while still struggling with waves of intense survivor's guilt and debilitating depression, is...well, if it's overwhelming for me to think about, imagine how it must be to live.

Motaz, too, has talked about the unimaginable emotional—beyond emotional!—experience of surviving the genocide only to watch it from the outside, alongside people who are going about their lives as if everything is normal.

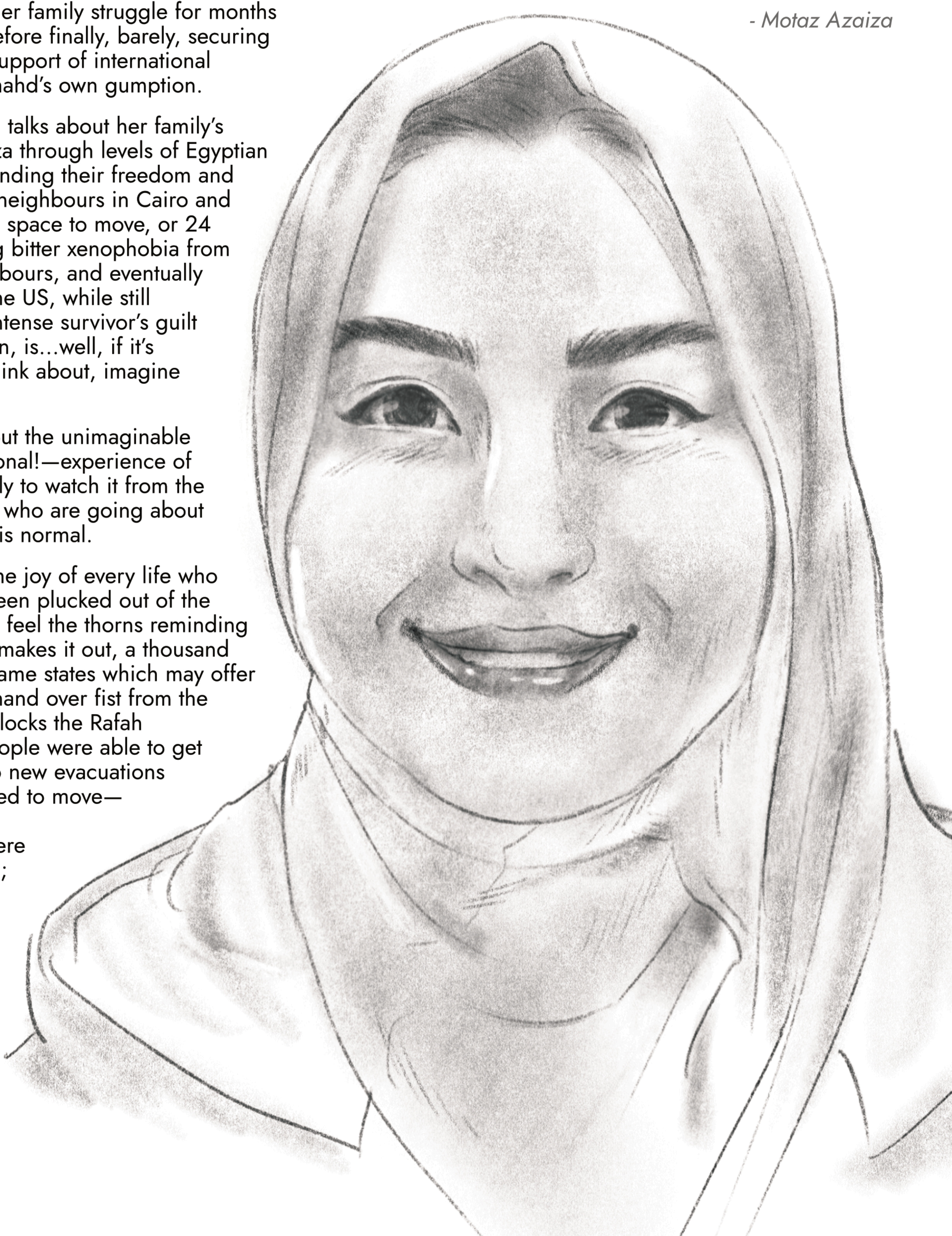
With one hand, we hold the joy of every life who by luck or by mercy has been plucked out of the flames. With the other, we feel the thorns reminding us that for every one who makes it out, a thousand are still trapped, that the same states which may offer escape are also profiting hand over fist from the genocide, that Israel still blocks the Rafah crossing—the only way people were able to get out of Gaza anyway, so no new evacuations are possible until it is forced to move—and that all our Palestinian neighbours, no matter where they are, are still occupied; to quote Shahd, "as a Palestinian I am occupied—in my identity, in my culture. I see it in a lot of ways, and it hurts...When I need to justify my existence as a Palestinian, then this is a form of occupation."

The response, I think, is the same as it ever is. Celebrate each universe our neighbours embody. Mourn the dead. Fight like hell for the living.

"Every child, every human being, from the United States to Palestine to Lebanon, deserves safety and to live a full life in freedom and with dignity.

We owe it to kids like Jood to fight for a better future before it's too late."

- Motaz Azaiza



First published November 3, 2024

Abdalrahman, Rabie, and Watermelon Buddies

Guest written by Candice Rozario, a local organizer in Scarborough and founder of Watermelon Buddies

My social media was always a quiet place. I used it to ingest memes and funny reels. My Facebook account's purpose was to find out what former schoolmates were up to, and Instagram? That was meant for burrowing into rabbit holes of self-help. #innerhealing.

I would think a dozen times before posting anything personal on my Instagram feed, so I could stay the right amounts of "likable" yet mysterious. Like most people, I spent a lot of time on social media, but made sure I didn't create content. I liked preserving my privacy while still keeping up with the latest trendy discourse.

Since catapulting myself into the pro-Palestinian movement, I have learnt that advocacy asks us to shed that privacy a little. Attending a protest means having your face out in public (of course, you can always mask up), signing a petition means putting your name behind something that can beckon change, making a donation sometimes means your email address is now on a mailing list.

Somewhere between being vocal about Palestine on my social media from the confines of a private account, Abdalrahman from North Gaza saw me.

Abdalrahman Almujaber is a 24 year old student who's lived in Gaza since he was a child. Before Israel began its assault on Gaza, he was nearly finished his studies in biomedical engineering. But after Israel destroyed his university and his home, he and his family have been struggling to survive. A lot of people don't like to ask for charity, and Abdalrahman is no different, but by January 2024 he found himself with no other choice, and began reaching out for help through social media.

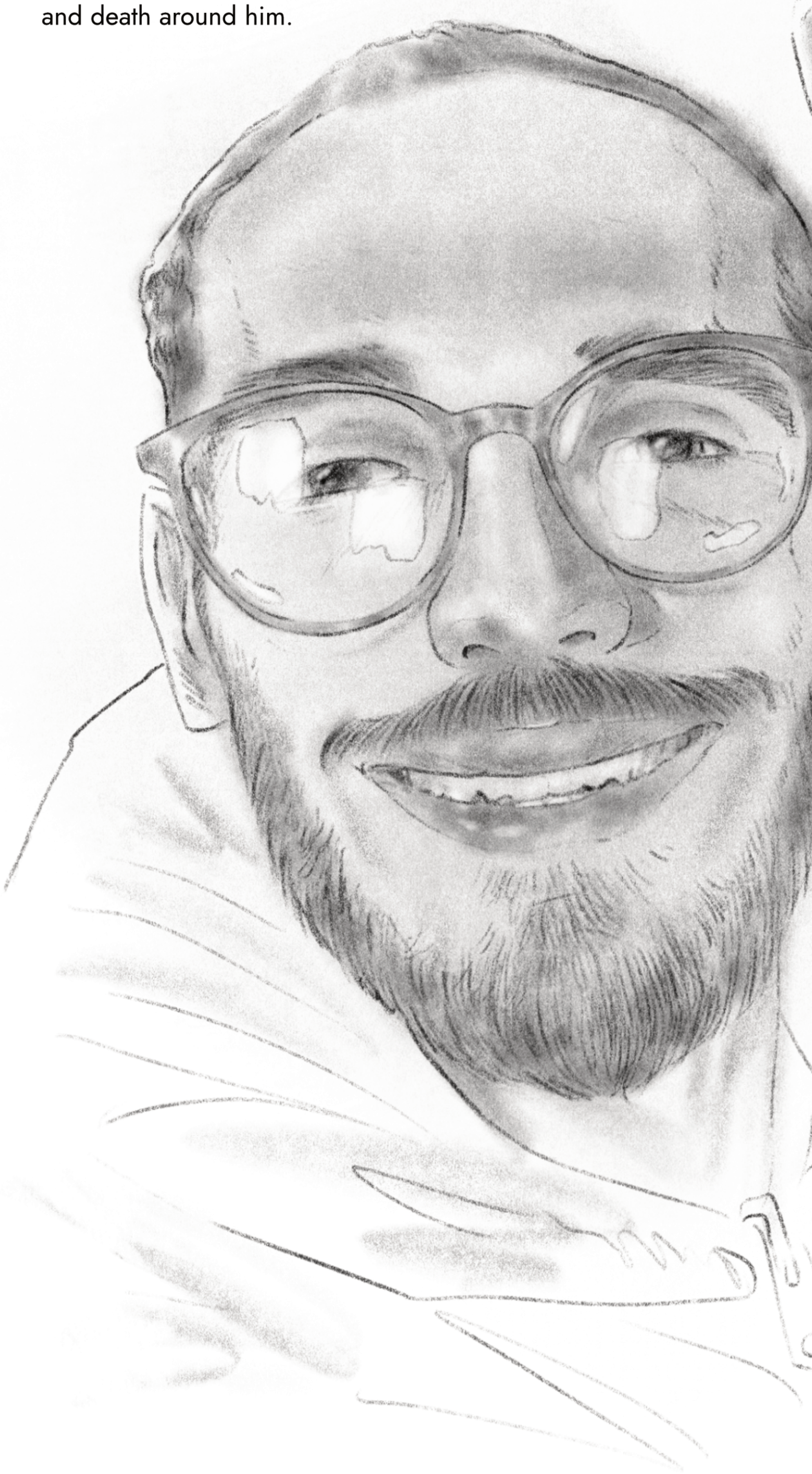
When he reached out to me, we made a connection and exchanged phone numbers; I would occasionally check in on him. I could see the horror unfolding in Gaza on my feed on Instagram and yet when I would switch to Whatsapp to ask Abdalrahman how he was doing, he would calmly reassure me of his razor-thin safety.

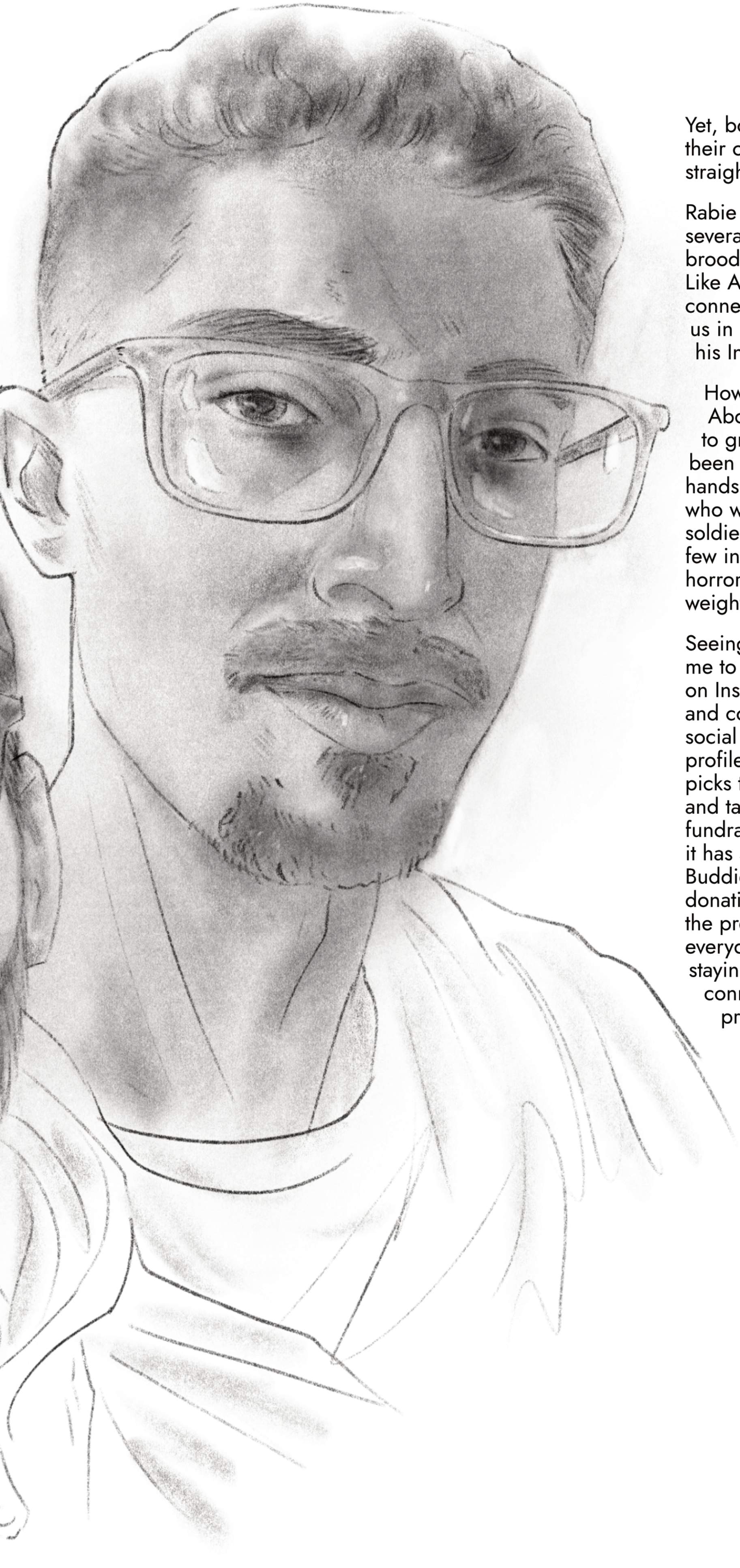
Through Abdalrahman, I got in touch with a person in California who is now a very good friend. Abdalrahman set up a Whatsapp group with the three of us, and shared the link to his followers. As this group grew with people from around the world, I realized that Abdalrahman had been building connections with many people, networking and nurturing connections for his survival. We are now 30 people in the group who share his fundraiser as often as we can and tag team the posts and stories. Some of us have health conditions, some of us have recently been laid off, some of us have children to raise, but the responsibility of supporting Abdalrahman's fundraiser never feels like it falls on just one of us—we have each other to share the tasks. Some of us have come up with different fundraising ideas (like art giveaways, or selling handmade items) to give Abdalrahman's fundraiser a boost.

It was through the mutual friend in California that I also met Rabie Hussein. Rabie, who is 28 and was born and raised in Gaza, also studied engineering. However, around four years ago, he began to feel trapped by the rigidity of his profession, so he joined a Palestinian literary institute to develop his romantic spirit. Since then, writing has become his focus, giving him new eyes on his life, allowing him to unpack experiences he never had words for before, and even helping him find love.

In some ways, these two young men could not be more different from each other.

While Abdalrahman is unwaveringly calculated, focused on setting small goals for his fundraiser, (and other fundraising initiatives for his neighbours), Rabie is a thinker, whittling words from the destruction and death around him.





Yet, both young men display a massive amount of resilience in their own ways; I do not know how they are able to think straight, more than a year into this genocide.

Rabie and I share an interest in writing, and it would seem several personality traits as well. I can relate to Rabie's broodiness and pensive spells. We writers are an odd bunch. Like Abdalrahman and other Palestinians, Rabie has made connections with people outside of Gaza; his writing drawing us in and our collective concern keeps us glued to checking his Instagram profile for signs of life.

However, Rabie doesn't seem inclined to replicate Abdalrahman's action of lassoing us into a Whatsapp group to grow his fundraiser. I do not expect him to—Rabie has been under the rubble twice, dug through rubble with bare hands looking for bodies of loved ones, and buried his uncle who was killed in the Nuseirat massacre in June 2024, where soldiers used aid vehicles to attack civilians.[1] These are only a few incidents I know of, from his over a year of living such horrors; it shouldn't be the burden of someone under the weight of such suffering to also pull themselves out of it.

Seeing the difference between these two young men inspired me to start Watermelon Buddies (**@wearewatermelonbuddies** on Instagram). The idea is, you pick a fundraiser from the list and consistently promote it as much as you're able on your social media (regardless of whether it's a public or private profile, or how many followers you have). When someone else picks the same fundraiser, you become Watermelon Buddies and tag each other in posts and stories promoting the fundraiser, pushing it out to both your circles. The hope is that it has a domino effect so you have a couple of Watermelon Buddies promoting the same fundraiser, steadily increasing donations while sharing the load. Most importantly, this takes the pressure off the Palestinian to create or publish content everyday, so they can focus on more important things, like staying alive. From the comfort of our homes with steady wifi connections, we do the networking and fundraiser promotion for them.

If you're interested in becoming a Watermelon Buddy, or have more questions about how it would work, please feel free to contact me at **TheWatermelonSeedInitiative@Gmail.com**. No matter how you use your social media, whether you're a pro or someone who just discovered the "post" button, you can help. This is a way that we can make a real, tangible difference, and use this technology for bringing people together, rather than dividing them apart.

I hope you'll join me in becoming a seed of change.

Use this QR code to visit the **Watermelon Buddies** Instagram!

First published November 7, 2024

UNRWA

In 1949, after the previous year's Nakba ("catastrophe") wherein Zionist forces expelled 750 000 Palestinians from their homes, the United Nations was faced with a problem. Namely, 750 000 people who were only a year ago farming their own lands, learning in their own schools, and finding medical treatment in their own communities, were now uprooted, tossed to the four winds to land in Gaza, the West Bank, and surrounding nations like Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. These people had no access to the support systems they'd developed for generations and were crying out for relief; the surrounding nations likewise were, if we're being charitable here, demanding support for the thousands of new mouths to feed. The UN's response: UNRWA.

UNRWA, or the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, became, over the next 75 years, a lifeline to Palestinian refugees—which, remember, includes at least 1/3 of all Palestinians, as even a vast many of our neighbours living in places like Gaza are internally displaced refugees from cities in what is now called Israel, many from villages that were destroyed and buried[1], not settled. UNRWA provides food aid, medical aid, and schooling to millions, while also being the largest employer in the occupied Palestinian territories, with over 30 000 employees. Writing for Middle East Eye, one of our previously-introduced neighbours, Shahd Safi, comments: "I grew up attending UNRWA schools. I have been taught, mentored and educated by UNRWA teachers - wonderful, dedicated, highly educated people. I was given many UNRWA services as a Palestinian refugee born in Gaza...All of the healthcare I received before leaving Gaza was through UNRWA." Her experience is emblematic of most of our neighbours in Gaza, as well as those living as refugees in the surrounding nations.

Last week, however, the Israeli parliament, known as the Knesset, voted overwhelmingly to ban UNRWA.

Specifically, in two motions, they banned UNRWA from working within Israel and from any Israeli officials communicating with UNRWA. While this might look like UNRWA's operations in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem are safe, because any and all aid entering any part of the occupied territories requires consent of Israeli officials, this is simply not the case. While UNRWA may still be able to operate in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, these changes, which will be completed within three months, will sever the UN lifeline to Palestinians in Palestine.

I will not mince words. This is murder.

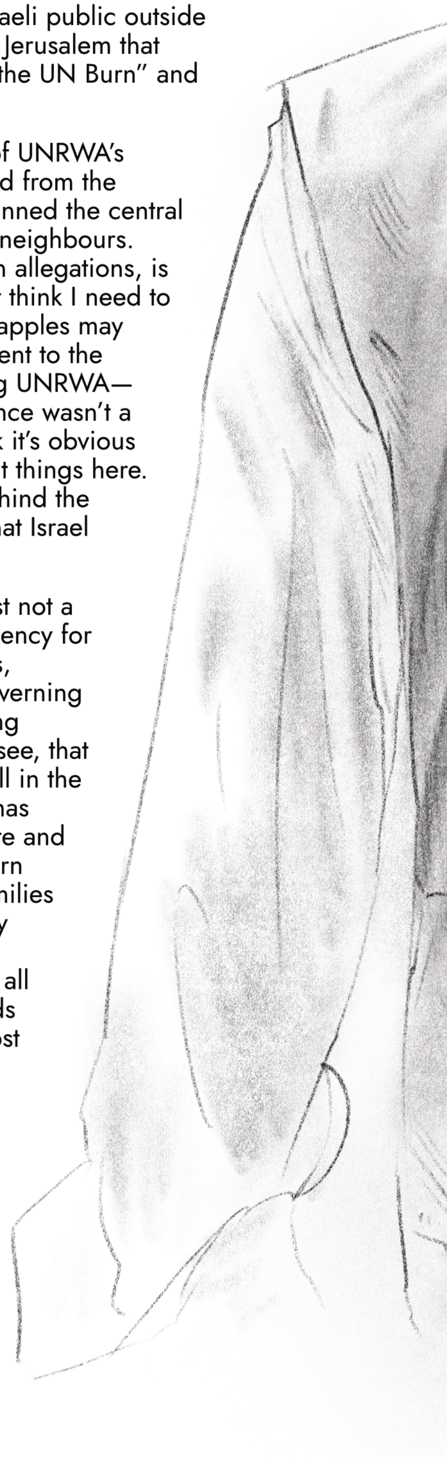
Looking just at Gaza, it's impossible to understate how vital UNRWA's aid is. If you've heard of a school in Gaza, it's almost certainly an UNRWA school. If you heard the news about Polio vaccinations in February and November, it was UNRWA that distributed those. And food, medicine, other aid—the vast majority of the time, it's either the Palestinian Red Crescent or UNRWA. We love and appreciate the smaller aid organizations helping our neighbours from within Gaza, like Ele Elna Elak[2], Thamra[3], and Watermelon Relief[4], but they're a drop in the bucket when it comes to UNRWA's aid. For good or ill, Gaza is reliant on UNRWA, and now Israel has kicked the crutch out from under them.

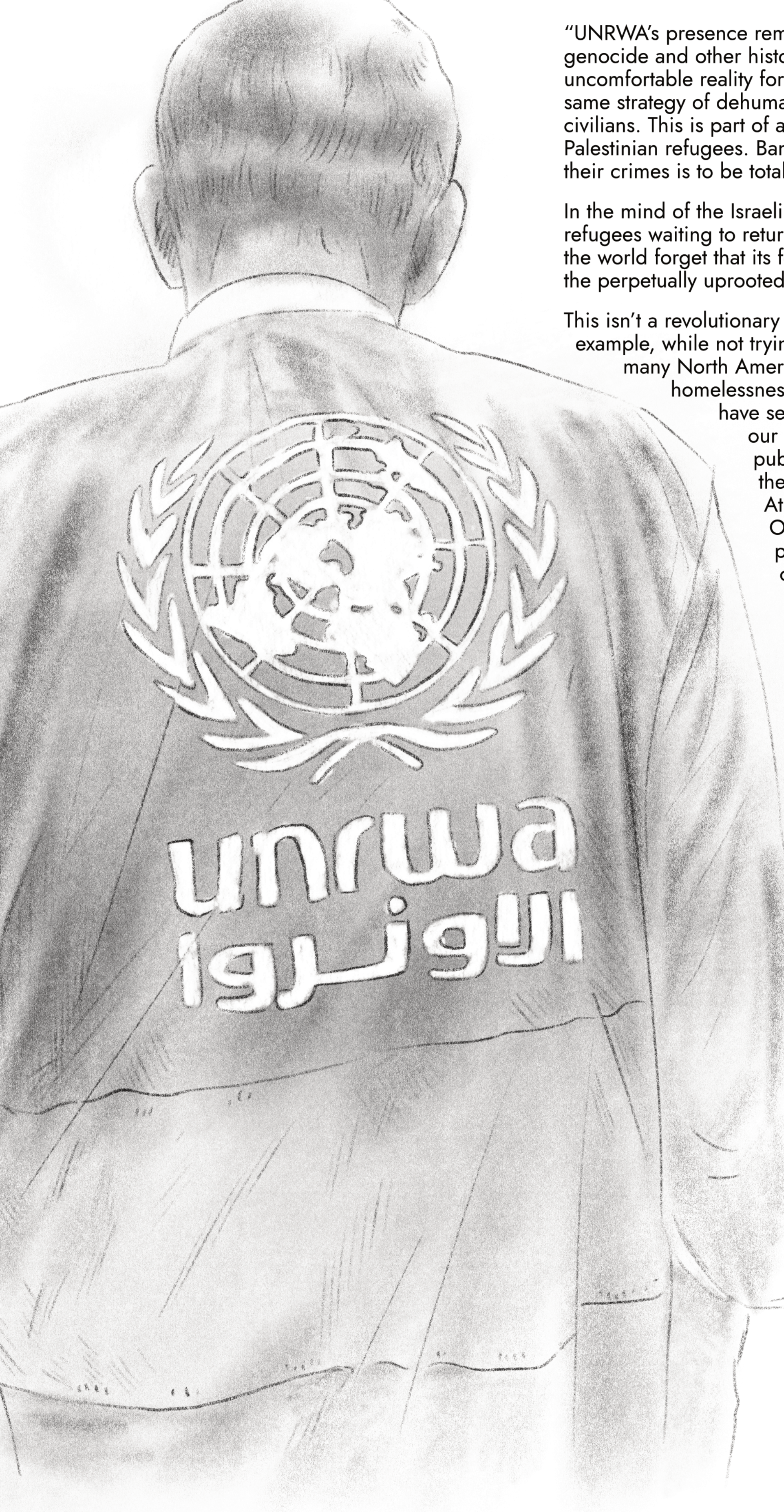
It's important to keep in mind however, that this comes at the end of Israel's long history of attacking UNRWA. You may remember in January when Israel alleged that several UNRWA employees participated in October 7th's Operation Al Aqsa flood. UNRWA reacted by immediately firing the accused employees, and the UN launched an investigation. Despite the UN's swift response, many countries responded on their own by cancelling their funding to UNRWA, including Canada and the United States. By August, the UN Office of Oversight Services (OIOS) had concluded that it was unable to corroborate Israeli allegations for more than half the accused. In the end, 9 employees remained fired as the evidence against them was plausible in the eyes of the OIOS. Meanwhile, Israel continued its attacks against UNRWA[5], including its systemic harassment against UNRWA workers at checkpoints in the West Bank, and its rounding up of UNRWA personnel in Gaza, and military strikes on UN schools and aid workers, resulting in the deaths of over 200 UN staff in Gaza—not to mention the demonstrations from the Israeli public outside the UNRWA compound in East Jerusalem that include children chanting "Let the UN Burn" and two separate arson attempts.

So, it is for roughly 0.0003% of UNRWA's workforce—now roundly excised from the organization—that Israel has banned the central pillar of aid for our Palestinian neighbours. That, along with other unproven allegations, is what the Knesset claims. I don't think I need to argue that the harm a few bad apples may have done is in no way equivalent to the harm Israel is doing by banning UNRWA—even if arguing moral equivalence wasn't a trap for our compassion, I think it's obvious we'd be arguing about different things here. Instead, I want to try to look behind the press releases and consider what Israel actually has to gain here.

UNRWA *is* a threat to Israel, just not a violent one. The 75 year old agency for supporting Palestinian refugees, administered by the highest governing body in the world—it's a glowing beacon, for those who care to see, that Israel and its occupation are still in the wrong. The scar of the Nakba has never been healed, and as more and more of our neighbours are born outside of a homeland their families were forced from, that scar only festers. That it requires tens of millions of dollars from nations all over the world[6] to treat demands that we look for a cure—the most obvious cure being affirming Palestinian refugees' right to return, as specified by UN resolution 194. Israel does not want millions of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. They want them *gone*.

To once again quote Shahd:





"UNRWA's presence reminds the world of Israeli occupation, the 1948 genocide and other historical atrocities against the Palestinians - an uncomfortable reality for Israel. To remove this reminder, Israel is using the same strategy of dehumanisation that justifies violence against Palestinian civilians. This is part of a larger move to erase the identity and history of Palestinian refugees. Banning an agency that contributes to documenting their crimes is to be totally expected."

In the mind of the Israeli Knesset, the cure to millions of Palestinian refugees waiting to return is to remove the 'refugee' label. If it can make the world forget that its foundation was contingent on creating a class of the perpetually uprooted, that original violence can also be forgotten.

This isn't a revolutionary tactic, and it's not unique to Israel. For one salient example, while not trying to equate scale, we can see it at play in how many North American cities have responded to rapidly increasing homelessness crises. In Ontario, where I live, the past few years have seen repeated, often overtly violent, attempts to clear our unhoused neighbours living in encampments off of public land (and even some private land, such as in the case of St. Stephen's in the Pine's encampment). At time of writing (November 2024), a coalition of Ontario mayors have asked our Premier for more power to continue encampment clearings, even in cases where courts have ruled against such tactics.[7] Encampments are populated by people who cannot find safe housing elsewhere, both because of government policies that prioritize luxury condos over affordable housing, and because shelter systems are perpetually at capacity. So, when encampments are cleared, our neighbours are forced to move not to housing but to other, less visible public spaces, or, unfortunately, into even less safe spaces—alleys, gutters, on top of subway grates—where they suffer from the elements and from violence, and, in many cases, die. The root problem is a lack of housing, but rather than treating *that ill*, these governments try to make the problem "go away" by making our neighbours invisible. If they make our neighbours live and die somewhere else, where we don't take notice of them, we might forget that the problem wasn't our neighbours at all, but the policy choices that denied them a home.

Whether it be a tent in the park or a UN agency for refugees, anything that allows us to see our neighbours in their distress, to listen to their stories, and to identify the causes of the injustice they experience, will be a threat to the forces that enact that injustice. And while we are rightly distressed by the immediate violence these forces use to destroy these vital lifelines, we can't forget the quiet violence they are trying to obfuscate. Do not forget, do not look away. Use your voice and stay loud. Don't let them win.

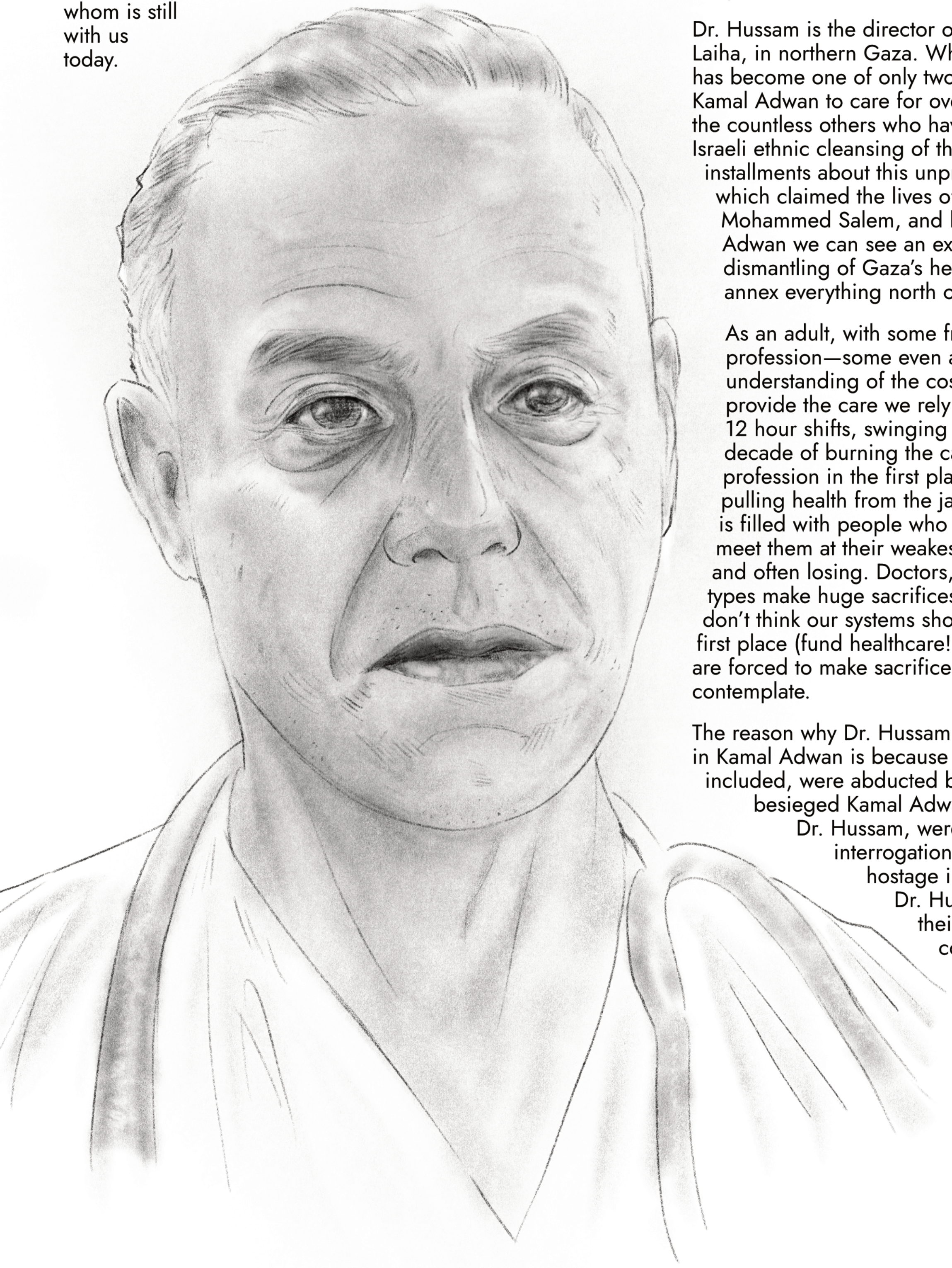
First published November 12, 2024

Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya

Pediatrician. Still Alive, but currently imprisoned without trial

> ***"We are doing what we can & we will never stop. I will not back down from delivering my humanitarian message: my profession is my duty, & I must continue with it."***
>
> ***- Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya***

I don't know about you, but my family has a rich history with healthcare providers. We've been unfortunate in that, even in our small extended family of just over a dozen people, we've had complex heart problems, as well as a good deal of physical therapy and home visits from Rns. We've also had an outsized experience with cancer, with four of our small clan being treated, only one of whom is still with us today.



When I was growing up, my cousin Krystianna, who had Neuroblastoma (a form of childhood cancer) was constantly in and out of the hospital. Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto became a second home for us, and while there are some things about that experience I know we'd rather leave in the past, one thing we'll never forget is the nurses, doctors, and surgeons who lavished her with love and care until the very end.

It's because of these experiences that the experiences of Gaza's healthcare workers resonate with me all the more, and right now, none resonates stronger than that of Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya.

Dr. Hussam is the director of the Kamal Adwan Hospital in Beit Laiha, in northern Gaza. While his specialty is pediatrics, he has become one of only two doctors and a few nurses left at Kamal Adwan to care for over 120 current patients, as well as the countless others who have been or will be injured by the Israeli ethnic cleansing of the north. I've written in the past few installments about this unprecedented assault and seizure, which claimed the lives of Sha'ban, Mahasen, Yousef, Mohammed Salem, and hundreds more, but in Kamal Adwan we can see an example of Israel's determined dismantling of Gaza's healthcare system as they continue to annex everything north of Gaza City.

As an adult, with some friends working in the healthcare profession—some even at Sick Kids—I have a better understanding of the cost that healthcare workers pay to provide the care we rely on. First there is the physical toll of 12 hour shifts, swinging between day and night, after over a decade of burning the candle at both ends to get into the profession in the first place. Then, the emotional weight of pulling health from the jaws of death. Pediatrics, especially, is filled with people who care deeply about children, yet they meet them at their weakest points, helping them fight for life and often losing. Doctors, nurses, surgeons, and carers of all types make huge sacrifices for the common good, and while I don't think our systems should require these sacrifices in the first place (fund healthcare!!!), doctors in Gaza like Dr. Hussam are forced to make sacrifices that nobody should even have to contemplate.

The reason why Dr. Hussam and his small team are nearly alone in Kamal Adwan is because almost 60 hospital staff, himself included, were abducted by Israeli military forces who besieged Kamal Adwan on October 25. Some, including Dr. Hussam, were released after hours of interrogation and threats, but most are still held hostage in administrative detention, leaving Dr. Hussam and his skeleton crew with their impossible task. They returned, of course, to a hospital teetering on the point of collapse—sometimes literally, as bombing severely damaged parts of the building. They have virtually no medical supplies, food, fuel, or even a single ambulance, meaning that injured people have to be brought to the hospital in animal drawn carts or in the arms of their neighbours.

Worse still, after being released, Dr. Hussam had to watch as the Israeli military killed his own son, Ibrahim, in front of him at the hospital's entrance. The grieving father buried his son beside the hospital, "so that he could stay close," and continued his work.

These are the sacrifices of Gaza's healthcare workers. Their choice to stay means the reality of constant threats of violence, imposed famine (both in terms of food and medical supplies), arbitrary detainment and interrogation, loss of family members, and the real possibility that—at any moment—they might become one of the thousands of injured they have to treat—or might be buried beside their hospital. With the recent statements from Israeli Brigadier General Itzik Cohen that no aid will be allowed into the north of Gaza,[1] they also know that there is no clear end in sight to their struggle and suffering.

And yet, they make that sacrifice, because the alternative is abandoning their patients—the ones who need them the most—and abandoning the conviction of care that upholds their profession. Israel wants to be able to draw a line around northern Gaza, drop some evacuation leaflets, and then designate anyone who remains a combatant. While our neighbours like Muhammad Bhar remind us that no one should be forced from their homes with threats of violence, the patients of Kamal Adwan Hospital remind us that some *can't* leave, even if they wanted to. As long as people remain, so too will those like Dr. Hussam who care for them. And were he my doctor—or my cousin's, my aunt's, or my grandmother's—I would want it no other way. Our responsibility, then, is to use our hands and our voices to ensure that places of healing—and our neighbours who work there—are protected, no matter what, starting with Kamal Adwan.

Free Dr. Hussam!

The month after I first wrote about Dr. Hussam, Israel launched another raid on Kamal Adwan Hospital and kidnapped him. The following was published on December 31, 2024

"We repeat: stop attacks on hospitals. People in Gaza need access to health care. Humanitarians need access to provide health aid. Ceasefire!" - Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO[2]

If you've been paying attention to news coming from our neighbours in Gaza, you know that there has been a lot happening this past week. Bombardment continues, joined now by winter's freezing temperatures. Because of Israel's constant displacement and destruction of infrastructure, there have been multiple freezing deaths in the past week, including at least seven infants, according to UNICEF.[3] On December 26, Israel struck the clearly marked press van where five Palestinian reporters were sleeping[4], burning them alive. And Israel's annexation of the north of Gaza continues as well, with a horrifying escalation coming this past Friday (Dec. 27) as Israel raided Kamal Adwan hospital[5], setting fire to the hospital, forcibly removing the patients to the non-functional Indonesian hospital, and kidnapping many of the hospital staff.

It's in light of this raid that I'm writing to you with an update on our neighbour Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya. Dr. Hussam is a pediatrician and the director of Kamal Adwan, and he's one of the doctors who Israel has kidnapped.

Currently, while Israel has not released any information about where Dr. Hussam is being kept, eyewitnesses have told his son, Idrees Abu Safiya, that his father has been seen in the notorious Sde Tieman prison[6], with multiple injuries. You may remember Sde Tieman as the prison camp where Muhammad al-Kurdi, an ambulance driver we met in August[7], was held and tortured.

If you've been following any of the other updates I've shared about Dr. Hussam or Kamal Adwan hospital, you'll know that this raid and kidnapping are only the most recent horrific notes in the bad tune Israel has been playing in northern Gaza these past few months. The hospital has been attacked multiple times, Dr. Hussam himself was shot and now walks with a cane, and you'll remember that Mahmoud Almadhoun, the head chef at Gaza Soup Kitchen, was killed by an Israeli drone while making a delivery to Kamal Adwan. It is vital that these attacks on Gazan healthcare do not pass silently.

Fortunately, some have been speaking up against this most recent attack, including the World Health Organization, who were "appalled"[5] at the raid against Kamal Adwan. Moreover, doctors and advocates around the world have been calling for the release of Dr. Hussam[8]. Conversely, support from national leaders, especially here in Canada, has been effectively non-existent.

As we enter a new year, the third year of this genocide, I know we all want to see better. We want the ceasefire that should have come over a year ago. We want our leaders to recognize international law. We want an end to the hypocrisy that sees Palestinian lives, hospitals, schools, and more, as less deserving of time and attention than Western ones. If we want that to happen, we need to keep raising our voices.

At time of publishing, Dr. Hussam is still being held, without trial, at the notorious Ofer Prison in the occupied West Bank. When he was finally allowed to meet with his lawyer on Feb 11, 2025 (after 46 days of being denied this right), he reported extensive torture and abuse, including many violent beatings with batons and electric rods, extended solitary confinement, and denial of treatment for his heart condition.

Medical professionals and Human Rights organizations around the world are still demanding his release. You can help by echoing this call to your Member of Parliament and visiting DoctorsAgainstGenocide.org to learn more.

First published November 16, 2024

Ahmed the Little Farmer

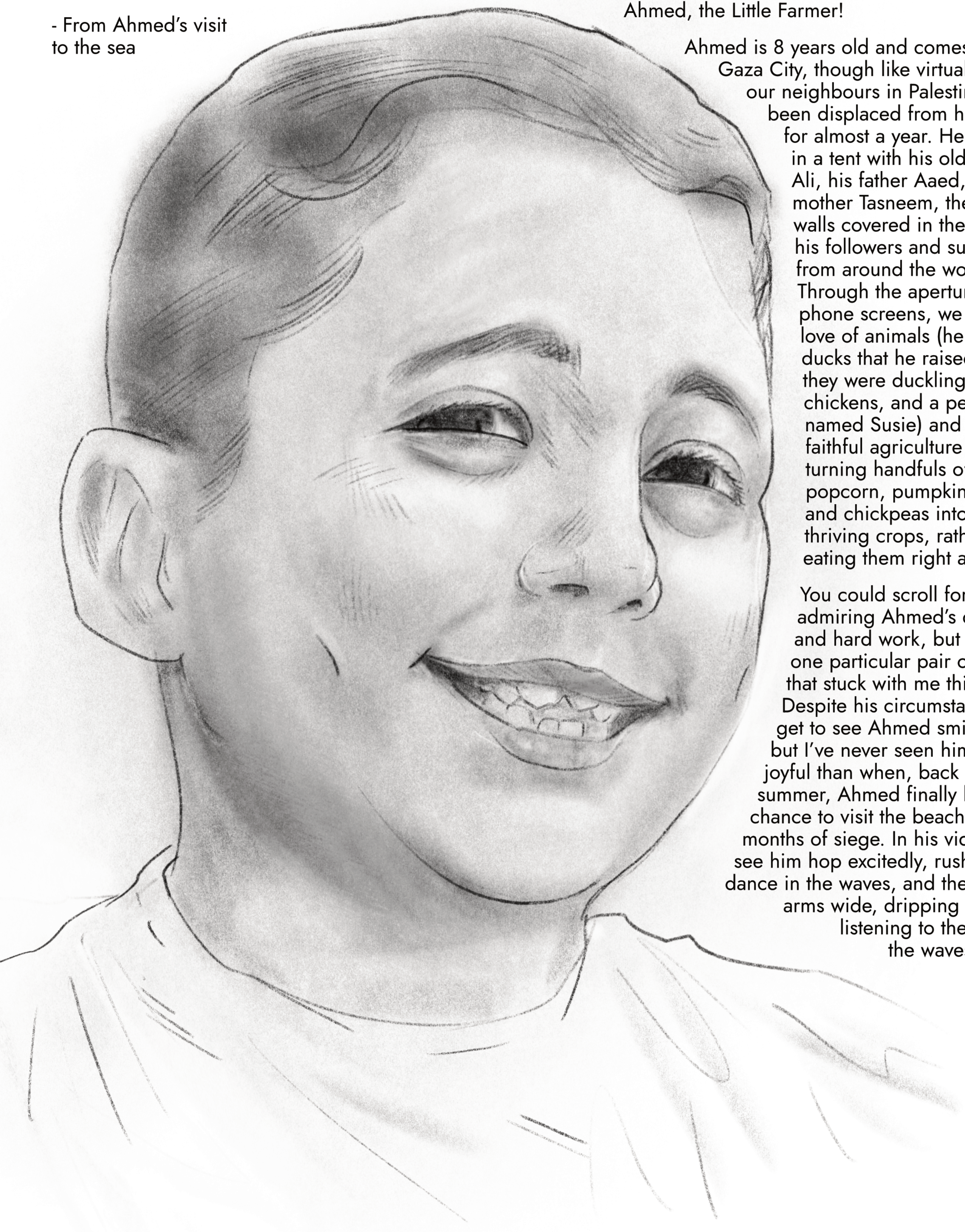
"[The sea is] the only place where we don't hear the sound of the planes because the sound of the sea's waves is higher than it"

- From Ahmed's visit to the sea

Today, I'd like to introduce you to a little guy who has been gaining a lot of momentum online for sharing his tactics for resiliency and encouraging us to join him: Ahmed, the Little Farmer!

Ahmed is 8 years old and comes from Gaza City, though like virtually all of our neighbours in Palestine, he has been displaced from his home for almost a year. He now lives in a tent with his older brother Ali, his father Aaed, and his mother Tasneem, the tent walls covered in the names of his followers and supporters from around the world. Through the aperture of our phone screens, we see his love of animals (he has two ducks that he raised since they were ducklings, a few chickens, and a pet cat named Susie) and his faithful agriculture skills by turning handfuls of popcorn, pumpkin seeds, and chickpeas into rows of thriving crops, rather than eating them right away.

You could scroll for days admiring Ahmed's diligence and hard work, but there's one particular pair of posts that stuck with me this week. Despite his circumstances, we get to see Ahmed smile a lot, but I've never seen him more joyful than when, back in the summer, Ahmed finally had the chance to visit the beach after 10 months of siege. In his videos, we see him hop excitedly, rush down to dance in the waves, and then stand, arms wide, dripping wet, listening to the sound of the waves.



A brief moment of relief amid a year of horror. A solitary moment where, for once, the sound of drones buzzing, airstrikes whistling, and warplanes roaring was drowned out by the steadfast sea.

Today, across Canada, people of conscience are once again speaking out and hitting the streets to demand an arms embargo. But this day of action is special, because it's focused on those same warplanes, hoping that maybe we can be the wave that silences them this time.

If you've ever contacted your MP to demand an arms embargo, you've probably received a response saying that 'Canada does not supply Israel with lethal arms.' I've talked before about how this response is a dodge, in my post for the last Arms Embargo Now day of action, but today I want to join my colleagues across Canada in shining the light on one particular example: Lockheed Martin F-35 warplanes.

While F-35s, the most advanced fighter jets in Israel's repertoire, are not actually built in Canada (they're built in the US), multiple weapons and technology manufacturers in Canada develop vital components used in their construction. Because we don't actually ship the planes from here to Israel, the government—and the public—does not consider this 'arms sales to Israel,' but Canadian businesses are crucial cogs in Israel's supply chain, making them both complicit in the deaths these jets cause and important pressure points for those committed to ending the violence.

What's worse, the manufacturers which make these parts, such as L3 Harris, BAE Systems, and Heroux-Devtek, are operating in our own neighbourhoods—sometimes our own backyards—without most of us even knowing they're there. When people ask 'why protest for Palestine in Canada?', among other reasons, it's because the people who make the weapons that kill our neighbours in Palestine live right here!

Moreover, exposing and blocking weapons manufacturing is a very tangible way that we can fight for justice and an end to Israel's violence. I'm reminded of the Scottish Rolls-Royce workers who in 1974 refused to service Rolls-Royce fighter plane engines used in Pinochet's dictatorial coup in Chile. This was the only plant in the world where these engines were serviced, so by boycotting these engines, the workers took Pinochet's air force out of the sky. It's the same thing in Canada, as certain parts, such as the engine sensors made by Gastops in Ottawa, are only made here.

It is our responsibility as Canadians to ensure that the work of our hands is not making the walls of Ahmed's tent shake (or worse). So far, our government seems uninterested in closing these loopholes, so we need to show them—and all our neighbours—that weapons of war have no place in our communities.

When I look at Ahmed, I see a lot of things. I see a smile that remains bright despite the worst horrors imaginable. I see a loving relationship with the land and what it produces. I see a beloved son. I see a little farmer with big ambitions for great growth. I want him to be able to have that, not in a tent or under the din of death-bringing machines. Ahmed shouldn't have to scrounge for peace in the sound of the waves. Together, we can be the roar that drowns out the warplanes.

Pray with your hands

Despite over a year of consistent calls from people of conscience across Canada for a two-way Arms Embargo which closes loopholes like this F35 supply route, Canada has not stepped up to fulfil its obligations.

No matter how long it takes, Canada is legally obligated to take all measures to ensure its exports aren't being used to commit war crimes. Even for those who argue that components aren't weapons and therefore don't break this law, Canada has a moral obligation to stand up for the rights and lives of our neighbours in Palestine, especially if we believe ourselves to be defenders of human rights.

You can call, email, or write to your Member of Parliament to demand that they support an Arms Embargo now! Find out who they are and how to contact them at OurCommons.ca/Members.

You can also go to ArmsEmbargoNow.ca for more info about what to ask for and some guidance if this is your first time contacting an elected official. This QR code will take you there!

First published November 20, 2024

Marwan Makhoul

Poet

A common response I get when I try to talk about our Palestinian neighbours, especially in church circles, is a concern for "being political." Or, more accurately "being *too* political."

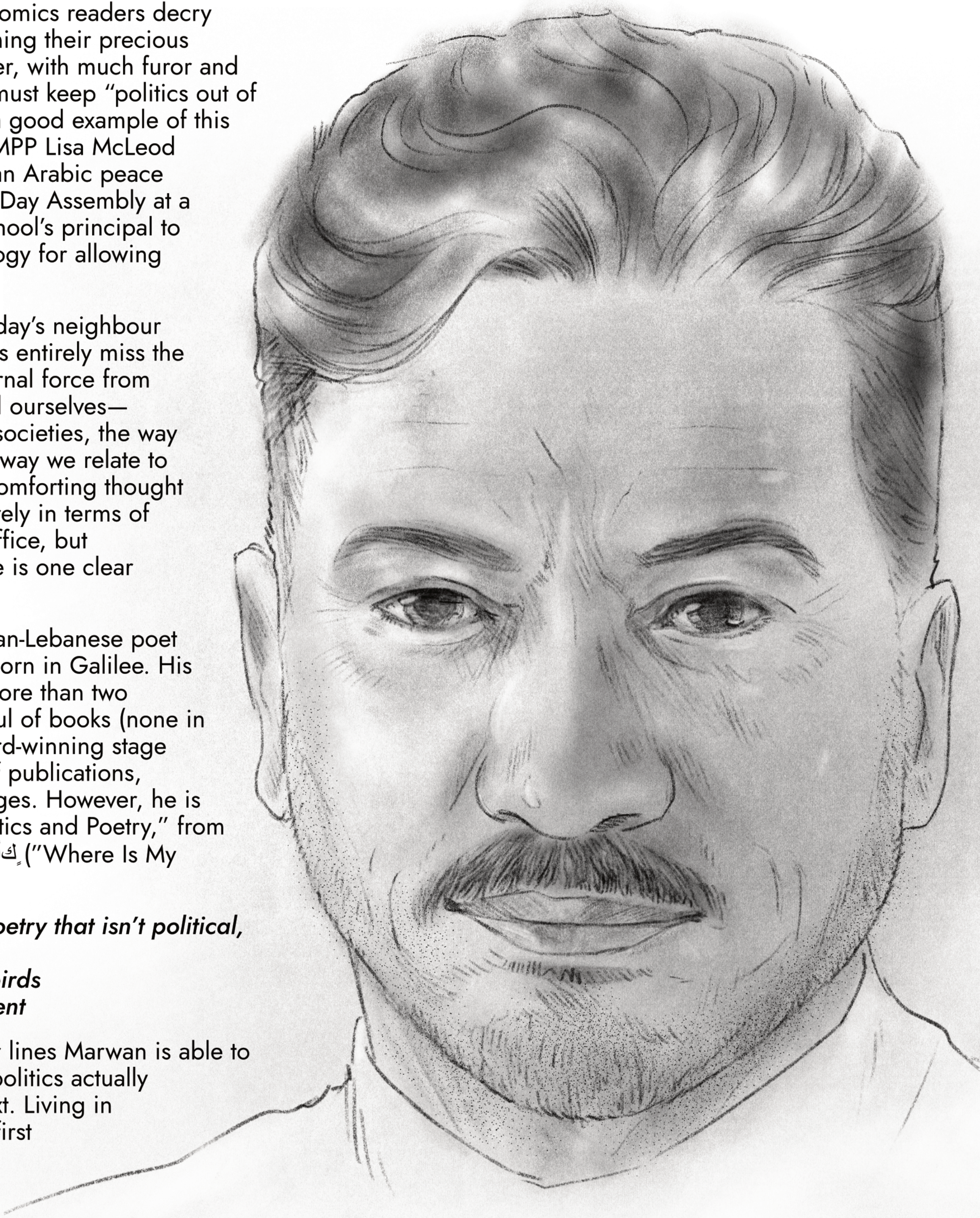
Really, it's a concern that I've heard in lots of places, and not just about Palestine. I hear it in the comics community, when so many of the loudest comics readers decry politics like it's a virus overcoming their precious characters. I hear it as a teacher, with much furor and hand wringing about why we must keep "politics out of the classroom." We even got a good example of this over the past week as Ottawa MPP Lisa McLeod went on a racist tirade[1] about an Arabic peace song used in a Remembrance Day Assembly at a OCDSB school, forcing the school's principal to issue a frankly egregious apology for allowing 'politics' in the assembly.

"On Politics and Poetry" by today's neighbour reminds us how these concerns entirely miss the mark. Politics is not some external force from which we can hermetically seal ourselves—politics is the ordering of our societies, the way we build our systems, and the way we relate to each other. It might not be a comforting thought for those who view politics purely in terms of which politicians we elect to office, but *everything* is political. Palestine is one clear example.

Marwan Makhoul is a Palestinian-Lebanese poet and civil engineer, originally born in Galilee. His body of work stretches back more than two decades and includes a handful of books (none in English unfortunately), an award-winning stage play, and writings in dozens of publications, translated into multiple languages. However, he is by far best known for "On Politics and Poetry," from his 2022 poetry collection, كِأ لِأ ("Where Is My Mother?"):

> ***In order for me to write poetry that isn't political,***
> ***I must listen to the birds***
> ***and in order to hear the birds***
> ***the warplanes must be silent***

It's short and sweet, but in four lines Marwan is able to encapsulate so much of what politics actually means, especially in his context. Living in the Galilee area, Marwan has first hand experience of having unwanted political dimensions forced upon him. As he says in an interview with Haaretz in 2012, "we [Palestinians] stayed put and others simply changed our country's name and its political character." As a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship, who has spent much of his adult life living in so called 'integrated' towns alongside Jewish Israelis, he's seen how his indelible identity has made him a political object. He's spoken about how, when his neighbours first see him, it's not as a



poet, an engineer, a dad, or even just a man, but as an "Arab"—a chess piece in their political framework; some have even begun moving away as more Palestinians move to town.

The same objectification can be seen around Palestine more broadly, especially during the current genocide in Gaza. What should be common sense calls for ceasefire, observation of international law, and humanitarian aid are instead seen as wildly political positions, suitable for discomfort, debate, and even censure.

What could be seen in one way as an unnecessary politicization of basic human decency actually reveals something we don't really like to talk about—"basic human decency" is in itself a political statement. For as long as people have been around, there have been people who disagree on what "decency" means, what supports and resources should be seen as a baseline, and even if there *should* be such a baseline—perhaps some of these bipedal animals we see walking around aren't fit to be called human after all?

Any good we enjoy, and even our ability to enjoy it, is either the result of those before us fighting for it—our rights and freedoms, our networks of care—or the indication of an inequality—think about the cheap land many of our ancestors settled in North America, which was only cheap because it was stolen from Indigenous nations. Likewise, injustices come as the result of human choices, whether as narrow as a single selfish action or as broad as a natural disaster worsened by climate change and inadequate disaster relief planning.

When those most affected by those inequalities and injustices speak out, we see this as political because it conflicts with what we experience as the status quo. But the status quo is not always good, and it is never neutral. So, for those of us who are not that affected, we *can* coast through our life dealing with our own problems and ignoring the injustices that affect others; for us, it is a choice to speak out or not, and it's a lot easier to decide not to take the risk—to reputation, safety, or our own resources—than to willingly disrupt the status quo.

And yet, for us Christians, this avowal of the status quo is fundamentally antithetical to the teachings of Jesus. Did Jesus say, "blessed are they who don't rock the boat"? Did he say, "blessed are they who 'don't really want to go there' because some in the congregation will disagree?"

No, he said, "blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness" and "blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We all want to live in a world where our poetry speaks of the birds; the beauty of creation is crying out for the poet's tongue and artist's hand to respond. But our neighbours are also crying out for us, and if you can't hear their voices, it's either because they have been drowned out by the roar of warplanes, the chime of the cash register, and the dull siren of the status quo, or because you are not listening. They want to live in that world too, so why don't we get there together?

Meet Your Neighbour

While "On Politics and Poetry" is Marwan's most popular poem, it is by no means his only poem. If you'd like to hear some of his newer poems, read in his own voice, you can visit his YouTube channel at **Youtube.com/@MarwanMakhool.**

I'd particularly recommend his poem "New Gaza," which is accompanied by lush animations by Mounir Al Mahmoud.

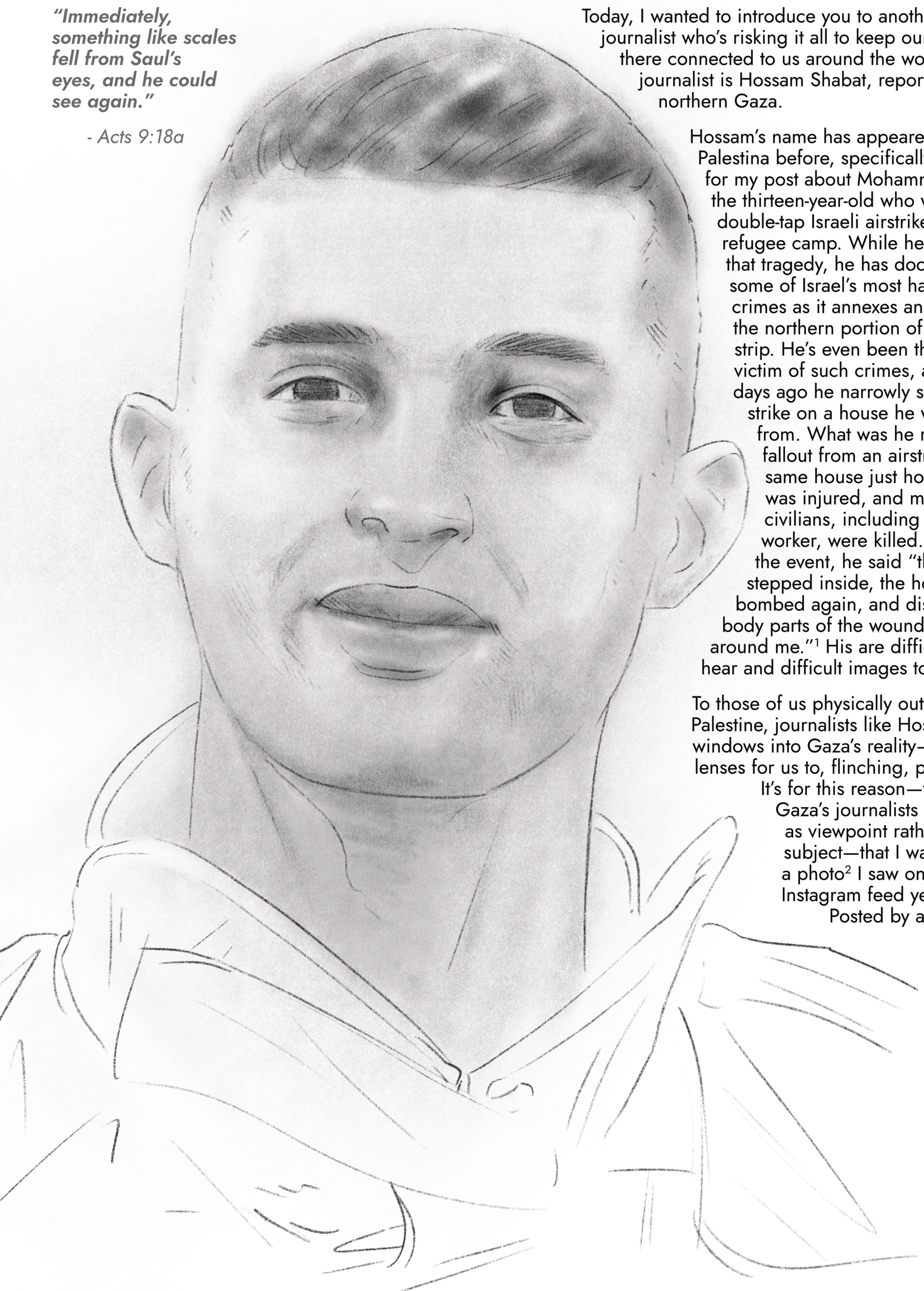
First published November 23, 2024

Hossam Shabat

Journalist. Martyred on March 24, 2025 by an Israeli airstrike

"Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again."

- Acts 9:18a



Today, I wanted to introduce you to another Gazan journalist who's risking it all to keep our neighbours there connected to us around the world. That journalist is Hossam Shabat, reporting out of northern Gaza.

Hossam's name has appeared in Imago Palestina before, specifically as a source for my post about Mohammed Salem, the thirteen-year-old who was killed by a double-tap Israeli airstrike in the Jabalia refugee camp. While he didn't report that tragedy, he has documented some of Israel's most harrowing crimes as it annexes and exterminates the northern portion of the Gaza strip. He's even been the direct victim of such crimes, as just a few days ago he narrowly survived an air strike on a house he was reporting from. What was he reporting? The fallout from an airstrike on that same house just hours earlier. He was injured, and multiple civilians, including a rescue worker, were killed. Recounting the event, he said "the moment I stepped inside, the house was bombed again, and dismembered body parts of the wounded flew around me."[1] His are difficult words to hear and difficult images to see.

To those of us physically outside of Palestine, journalists like Hossam are our windows into Gaza's reality—unflinching lenses for us to, flinching, peer through. It's for this reason—this role that Gaza's journalists so often play as viewpoint rather than subject—that I was so struck by a photo[2] I saw on Hossam's Instagram feed yesterday. Posted by another Gazan man, Karam Abooda (it showed up in Hossam's feed as a collaborative post), the photo shows Hossam sitting low on a curb, his helmet and microphone hanging limply from one hand, with his other on his forehead. He looks so unimaginably tired. And can you blame him? The familiar adage (familiar if you've ever been to a march for Gaza at least) is that, while most run away from the sound of an airstrike, Gaza's journalists are the only ones who run towards it. Hossam does a lot of running, figuratively or literally, and it takes its toll. He said in an interview with The Legal Agenda:

"I wake up in the morning, and my main concern is to find, document, and report the occupation's crimes. This affects my ability to secure food. In northern Gaza today, you can either document the occupation's crimes or obtain food, but not both at once."

Before Israel began its assault, Hossam's dreams were of building a media and marketing company, not sharing images of carnage. When the Israeli military destroyed his family's home and restaurant less than a week into the assault, Hossam's mother begged him to flee with the rest of his family to Rafah. Instead, Hossam chose to use his skills to stay in the north and document, working with Al Jazeera to bring the reality on the ground to the world. More than a year later, he's still choosing to stay in the centre point of the assault for the sake of his neighbours. After more than a month of the extermination of northern Gaza, despite nearly being blown up, he is still documenting and reporting—even if the world does not appear to be listening.

Much has been said in recent years—through the erosion of democracy in the West, to the collective awakening to the existential threat of the climate crisis and the institutionalized apathy that fuels it—of the banality of evil. Evil is, most often, mundane and boring, monotonous even—the slow steam roller which plods on unfazed by that which it crushes. It's the decades of policy that cement military aid to Israel as a cornerstone of American politics, regardless of partisan affinity. It's the leagues of red tape and bylaws that make the greed of the status quo far easier than ambitious and compassionate solutions. And crucially, it's the genocide that has rolled on for 413 days, hoping that we would get tired and look away; it's the occupation that has literally burrowed itself into the land through the foundations of its illegal settlements and cinderblock walls; it's the annexation of northern Gaza which has become its own monotonous list of casualty counts and repetitive violence.

The goal of this monotony is to normalize violence and sand us down, piece by degrading piece, until we find ourselves weary, the horrors unspectacular, and resistance futile. While this impacts our emotions in ways that I can't begin to discuss here (see the On the Nose podcast's November 14 episode, "Volatile Emotions," for that), I think our focus should be on our actions. The goal of this process is to create inaction; in moving we refute it.

I hope we can look to Hossam and his colleagues as our guides in this. Obviously, he did not choose to be in this situation, but when presented with capitulation or resistance, he chooses to pick up his camera and resist. It was not Hossam's choice to be Israel's target, but it is a choice to stay where he is needed. We make a similar, if woefully inequivalent, choice when we choose to take what Hossam gives us and figure out something to do with it—figure out where we're needed.

It is very easy in our places of comfort to fall into the seductive lull that surrounds us and to close our eyes. If you wondered why I started this post with that peculiar passage from Acts, it's because, for so many of us, people like Hossam—and this whole twisted year—have coaxed the scales from our eyes, and we've been able to have a good look at our neighbours' suffering. It can be very tempting to want to tape the scales back on our eyes. If we're not careful, they might regrow all on their own, sedimented and mortared by a million degradations. For the sake of our neighbours, we cannot allow that to happen.

"After a rough night, I put on the press armor again and gather strength to continue the coverage! Neither the occupation nor the world will believe our insistence on our message; because we understand its importance. We can't sit and be comfortable while our people are being killed; in the last days this armour is like my shirt that I don't take off."[3]

- Hossam Shabat, the day after his injury

On March 24th, 2025, Hossam was killed by an Israeli airstrike—part of the renewed genocidal assault on Gaza after Israel unilaterally ended the January ceasefire. Roughly an hour earlier, Hossam reported on the killing of his colleague, Mohammed Mansour, a correspondent for *Palestine Today,* amid Israel's heavy bombing of displacement tents in Khan Younis.

Hossam is gone, but the truth he fought and died to document can still be found on his Instagram (**@hossam_shbat**).

First published November 29, 2024

Najwan Darwish *Poet*

"We humans still don't seem to understand that we're all connected. Everyone is a "foreigner" at some time or another. At any moment, any of us can again become a foreigner and a refugee." - Najwan Darwish

"Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:2)

Today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and I've been thinking a lot about solidarity.

Really, I've been thinking a lot about solidarity for the past year, and longer. What does solidarity mean when I sit at my desk in Toronto, thousands of miles from where the bombs are falling on Gaza? What does solidarity mean when the risks I face are to relationships and career and comfort, while theirs are to life and limb and home? What does solidarity mean as a follower of the God who became human, but whose Advent is precipitated, in my neck of the woods, less by repentance and more by Black Friday deals?

Today I wanted to introduce you to our neighbour, the poet, Najwan Darwish, who I think can give us some guidance.

Najwan, who was born in Jerusalem, is one of Palestine's most renowned contemporary poets, having published nine books of poetry and been translated into more than 20 languages (and fortunately for us, unlike our last poet, Najwan has a wealth of books translated into English, published by the New York Review of Books). Beyond poetry, he also has an extensive career in cultural journalism and criticism, and was one of the founding members of the cultural section of The New Arab, an outlet you'll have seen several times here at Imago Palestina.

I first encountered Najwan through the poem of his that I've reproduced alongside his portrait, titled "Who remembers the Armenians?" For those who don't know, our neighbours in Armenia suffered their own genocide between 1915 and 1917, at the hands of the Ottoman Empire; between 600 000 and 1.5 million Armenians were killed, primarily through massacres and death marches. I wouldn't be surprised if you hadn't heard about it though, because it's been one of the most clearly documented and yet underdiscussed genocides of the 20th century; the government of Turkiye, the successor of the Ottoman Empire, still actively denies it, over 100 years on.

Even in countries that do acknowledge the Armenian genocide, like Canada, it's not a common topic. Unless you have an Armenian friend who feels comfortable talking about it, or took a specific class on genocide (which is where I learned about it), odds are it won't come up, even in discussions of World War One, which served as this atrocity's backdrop.

I don't think it's unfair to say that, generally, we don't like learning about things that make us uncomfortable. While everyone agrees we live in polarized times, Western society is nevertheless very good at insulating us from real ideological conflict—the kind of thing that shows you a world outside your comfort and asks for sacrifice or change. And in a society so built on histories and present systems of exploitation, capitalism is very good at putting boards under our feet so we won't see who we're stepping on. We put up distance when something is too close for comfort.

But for a Palestinian like Najwan, the parallels between this crime against the Armenians, rooted in colonial conflict and long swept under the rug, and the suffering of his own people are too stark to deny. About this poem, he says in an interview with the Guardian, "you see the ironies of history; history mocks us. It shows us that the things we thought people suffered in the past – they're still in front of you. It says, you think you are writing about the past; you're really writing about your future."

Reading the poem though, it doesn't feel like a historical conversation. I am always struck by the intimacy Najwan attributes to these connections—he doesn't see his Armenian neighbours as distant cousins or historical curiosities, but as sitting beside him through the trivial mundanities and mundane degradations of his daily life. There is a closeness that is hard to describe without remembering that "familiar" has its roots in "family."

I think solidarity comes from recognizing this closeness and choosing to ratify it in action. It's about denying an illusion of distance—whether physical, historical, or by structures built to divide and control. It isn't just recognizing the person who stands beside you, but linking arms with them and declaring that you won't be divided. This is the solidarity we see in this poem, and elsewhere in Najwan's writing.

Najwan's work points to a broad tapestry of solidarity. It suggests that those who have experienced the yoke of oppression have the opportunity to recognize their closeness and build solidarity across time, distance, and the walls that oppressors have built. He speaks, in an interview with *The Guardian,* of Maori people who translated his poems for a similar day of Palestinian solidarity, and I can't help but think of the Indigenous people here on Turtle Island who share a similar history, and who, in their diverse nations across their own occupied lands, will be marching today in solidarity with Palestine. I can't help but think of the Irish contingent that strengthens so many marches in Toronto, or the Palestinian murals that enliven the walls of Belfast. I can't help but think of Latinx4Palestine here in Toronto, or their siblings throughout Central and South America who were some of the first to speak out on the global stage against the genocide in Gaza. I can't help but think of South Africa, whose lawyers brought the case against Israel's genocide to the International Court of Justice all the way back in December. And, of course, I can't help but think of the people of Lebanon, now finally able to return to their homes after also being bombarded by Israel, and yet unrelenting in their solidarity with Palestine.

I also can't help but think of my many courageous Jewish siblings who understand that walls and bombs will not bring safety, such as those at Independent Jewish Voices and Jewish Voice for Peace. True safety only comes through relationship and solidarity—through knowing your neighbour and having faith that they will share the weight of any danger.

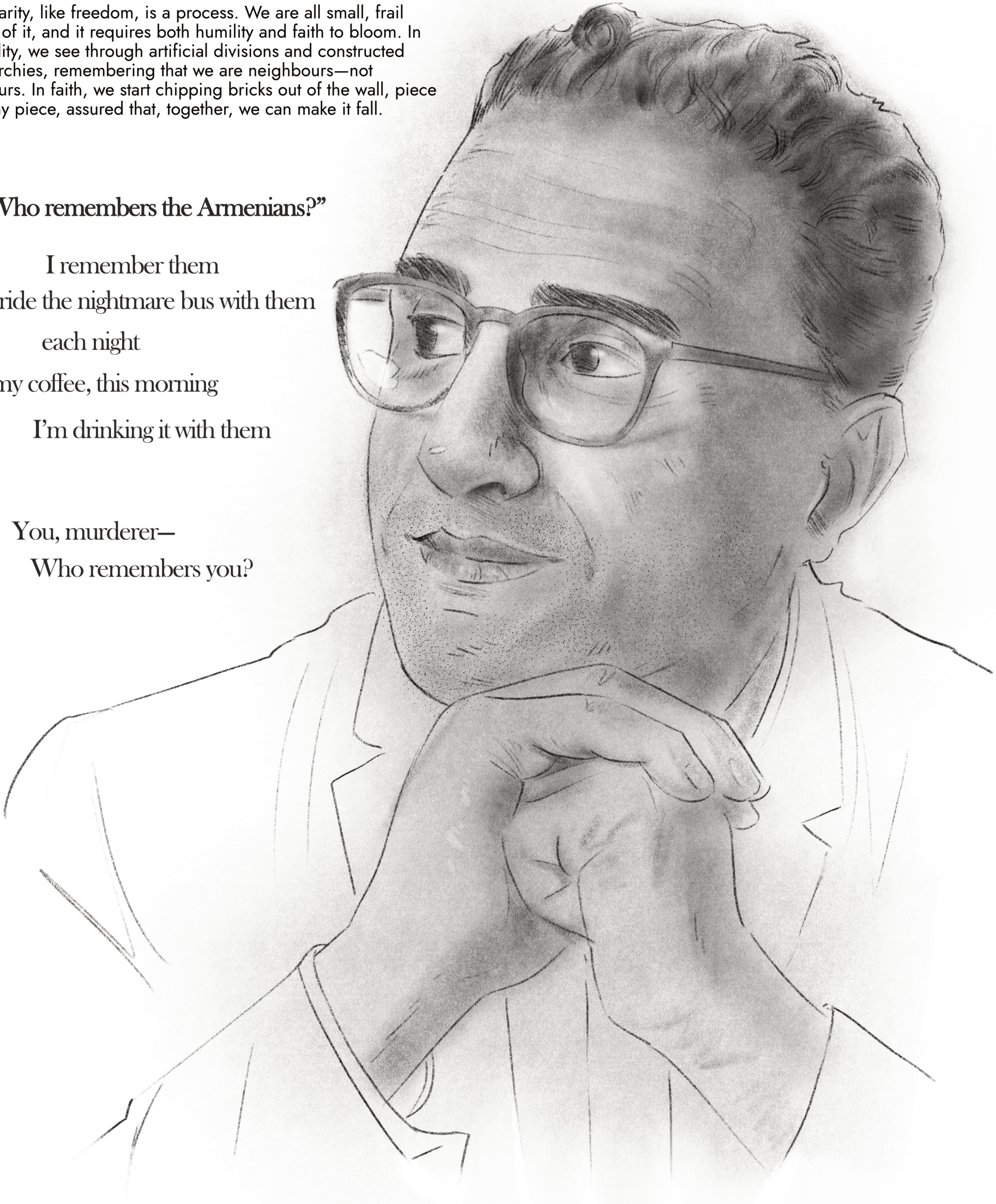
For those of us who have more often been beneficiaries of systems of oppression, to enter into real solidarity we need to understand that we have benefited from the artificial divisions that are so often sold to us as safety. Fannie Lou Hamer famously said that "nobody's free until everyone's free," and it's true. Our comforts will be founded in the injustices of others until we are willing to meaningfully share their burdens, and our neighbours will not find their freedom until we all break down the walls and floorboards that divide us.

Solidarity, like freedom, is a process. We are all small, frail parts of it, and it requires both humility and faith to bloom. In humility, we see through artificial divisions and constructed hierarchies, remembering that we are neighbours—not saviours. In faith, we start chipping bricks out of the wall, piece by tiny piece, assured that, together, we can make it fall.

“Who remembers the Armenians?”

I remember them
and I ride the nightmare bus with them
each night
and my coffee, this morning
I’m drinking it with them

You, murderer—
Who remembers you?



First published December 4, 2024

Mahmoud Almadhoun

Chef. Martyred on December 1, 2024

"I dream of a future in which we are not dependent on foreign aid and in which our natural resourcefulness and bountiful land are put to rightful use. In which there is no suffocating blockade — now in its 17th year — controlling the movement of everything that leaves and enters Gaza. Until then, we will keep serving our community, remembering that when all else has failed the Palestinians, the land did not." - Mahmoud Almadhoun, writing for the Washington Post

I was once told during a meeting, when I asked if our organization could do more to support our neighbours in Palestine, that we should be careful because (forgive the paraphrase) "things change so fast over there."

I know what they meant: "it's too complicated," that common refrain we hear from people who might want to care but have been convinced that the reality is too confusing, too unpredictable, too chaotic. But today, "things change so fast," has a different meaning to me.

Today, I'd like to introduce you to Mahmoud Almadhoun, the head chef and one of the founders of Gaza Soup Kitchen. GSK is a lifesaving resource for our neighbours across Gaza, but particularly in northern Gaza, as Israel continues its annexation and extermination campaign there.

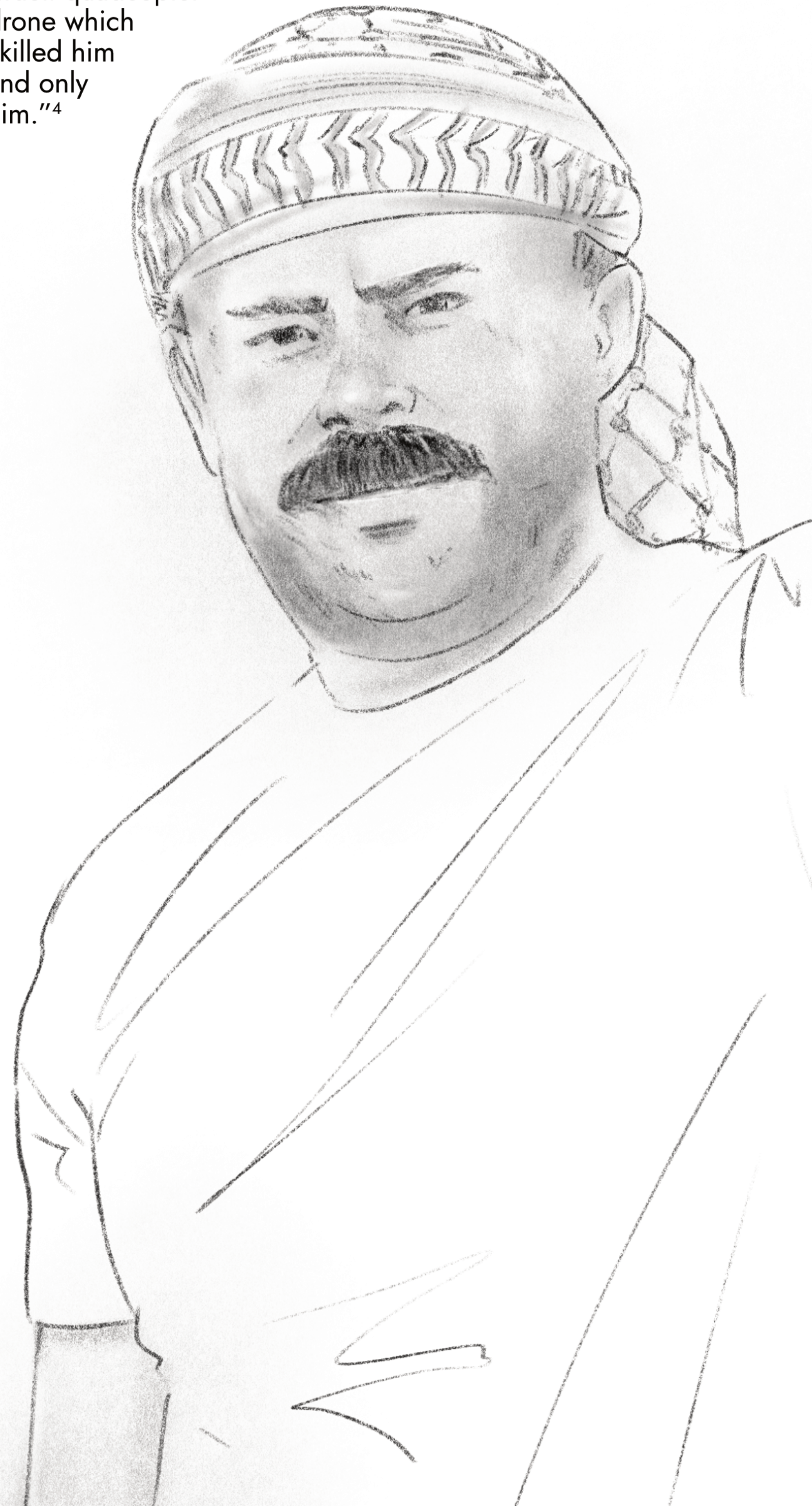
Originally founded by Mahmoud and some of his friends in Beit Lahia at the top of the Gaza Strip, GSK began life as four pots, some firewood, some bare essentials, and tenacity; with that, they were able to feed 120 families on the first day, and since then have continued to feed Gaza's families, now feeding up to 3000 people each day, all across Gaza. They also supply food to local hospitals, including Kamal Adwan hospital (which you'll be familiar with from our introduction to Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya), transporting the food on foot through the rubble-lined streets.[1] Gaza Soup Kitchen's stated goal is "to ensure no one in Gaza goes to bed hungry," and though this is a gargantuan task in the face of Israel's intentional starvation tactics, GSK is not giving up.

More than just food, over the past year, Gaza Soup Kitchen has been able to expand to offer schools and medical clinics, pushing back against Israel's repeated, systematic attacks on both of these institutions throughout Gaza. Even after their own school became a victim of these attacks, when it was bombed at the beginning of November,[2] GSK has not faltered in its commitment to the welfare of our neighbours in Gaza. In so many ways, it's everything I've been talking about here on Imago Palestina: a community—not just an individual—taking care of each other, resisting the death-bringing forces of colonialism through mutual aid, and showing the rest of the world how we can also play a part in dismantling these systems of oppression.

I wanted to tell you all this, to highlight this significant, if small scale, win. I wanted to celebrate the ingenuity, resilience and sumud—steadfastness—of our neighbours.

And then Israel assassinated Mahmoud Almadhoun.

On the morning of December 1, as Mahmoud began his daily routine of caring for his neighbours, a routine he once described as "dignifying and familiar,"[3] he was attacked by an Israeli quadcopter drone which "killed him and only him."[4]



Those closest to Mahmoud at Gaza Soup Kitchen believe that Mahmoud was targeted for the same support of Kamal Adwan hospital that I praised earlier; in fact, he was killed on his way to deliver produce to the hospital. As Israel continues its annexation of northern Gaza, it has repeatedly attacked Kamal Adwan, one of the last bastions of support for the people resisting ethnic cleansing in the north by staying in their home.

Of course, I talked about this when I introduced you to Dr. Hussam, but since then the attacks have only increased. Dr. Hussam was shot by a quadcopter drone on November 25,[5] narrowly surviving but being sent into intensive care. On November 29, another quadcopter drone shot and killed Dr. Ahmed Al-Kahlout,[6] the head of the Kamal Adwan ICU. The hospital itself has been bombed multiple times in the past month, including as recently as yesterday.[7]

If you're noticing a trend, it might be that all three of these men were injured or killed not by large, imprecise aerial volleys, but by targeted attacks from quadcopter drones—the military version of the four-propeller drones you might use for aerial photography. These are weapons with a long history of being used *specifically for surveillance*, not even considering the many,[8] many,[9] many[10] murders they have been linked to. These are not imprecise machines.

And yet, here I am telling you about attacks on aid workers and doctors. Here, in what should have been a story about celebrating resilience, I'm telling you about our dead neighbour that the Israeli military *chose* to kill.

So when that person told me that "things change so fast," they were right. Things do change so fast—this man who was alive last week is dead today, and who knows who's next? Who knows which of the neighbours we've met so far who don't have big social media followings are already gone? But that person was wrong if they meant that this is chaos. This is not chaos.

We didn't get ourselves 14 months deep into a genocide by accident; we got here by people making choices. Specifically, we got here by a few very powerful people making choices—to uphold colonialism, to maintain occupation, to keep funding arms, to veto ceasefires, to spin the narrative—and by most of the rest of us, convinced of this myth of chaos, making the choice to look the other way.

Some, like Mahmoud, made the choice to get up early each morning, shake off the day's despair, and care for their neighbours.

In his final post, Mahmoud signed off with the word "mostamreen" (مستمرين), which means "we will continue." I know our neighbours at Gaza Soup Kitchen will continue to get up and take care of each other. I wonder what choices the rest of us will continue to make.

Pray with your hands

Despite the loss of its beloved chef, Gaza Soup Kitchen is still up and running, feeding hundreds of our neighbours every day. At time of publishing, Israel has once again cut off food and water to Gaza, meaning that Gaza Soup Kitchen's work is more important than ever.

You can support them right now by visiting GazaSoupKitchen.com and making a donation to their lifesaving work.

First published December 17, 2024

Mohammed R. Mhawish

Journalist & Writer. Forced into exile in Egypt

> ***"She was alive, but her eyes stared back at me unblinkingly. I knew she was searching for the same thing I was: a remnant of the safety we once felt in the home that had held our laughter, our arguments, and our plans for the future, yet was now nothing but shattered concrete and bent steel."***
>
> *- Mohammed R. Mhawish*

A year ago, Rev. Munther Isaac and the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem tried to wake up their Christian neighbours in the West by unveiling their nativity scene: one where the baby Jesus was nestled not in a creche, but in a pile of rubble. "If Jesus were to be born today, he would be born under the rubble in Gaza," Rev. Isaac warned Christians around the world in his Christmas eve sermon[1]. And yet, one year later, what has changed? Israel's bombs still fall, the rubble has only multiplied, and Christ is buried deeper than ever. And he's not the only one.

For us in the West, it's difficult to imagine what it's like under the rubble. Sure we see pictures and videos, but if we're being introspective, deep down it feels like something that only happens to other people in other places. That's why I was so struck reading the story of today's neighbour, Mohammed R. Mhawish.

Mohammed is a journalist from Gaza, now living in Cairo, and has written dozens of features for +972 Magazine, Al Jazeera, and the New Arab (among others), analysing the political and societal happenings in Palestine as they relate to our neighbours who experience them most directly. In the case of his recent +972 Magazine article, "A year ago, an Israeli airstrike buried me alive. I'm still clawing my way out,"[2] it was Mohammed himself with the most direct experience.

I'd urge you to read the article, because despite its harrowing subject matter, it is beautifully written, and I won't be able to properly encapsulate it here. Suffice it to say, it recounts his experience on the morning of December 7, 2023 when, freshly returned from reporting on Israel's genocide in other parts of Gaza, he and his family were struck by an Israeli airstrike which destroyed their family home and buried them under a mountain of rubble. Mohammed remembers realizing what had happened, feeling his limbs pinned and useless in unnatural configurations, and crying out for his wife Aasma, his three-year-old son Rafik, and his parents. Hours later, rescuers finally freed them from the rubble. He learned that, while his immediate family survived—albeit with broken bones and shrapnel injuries—four people sheltering with them, including two extended family members, were killed in the attack.

Here we see what we, callously, expect to see in the stories of rubble. The strike. The waiting. The bloody reveal. We know that the details are different—the time for one thing; we know that, especially with Israel's escalating attacks on Palestinian first responders, many of our neighbours languish under the rubble for dozens of hours, for days—some, we know, will have been lost forever under the rubble of their demolished lives. I think of Hind Rajab—the second Palestinian neighbour I introduced you to[3]—and the 4000 other children that Save the Children estimated missing all the way back in June. I wonder how many more children have been added to that tally in the months since.

But I didn't bring you Mohammed's story as another familiar story of rubble. I brought his story because it reminded me what happens after the rescue.

In the midst of a crisis, we rightly focus on the most immediate physical demands. Lift off the rubble. Feed the hungry. Call a ceasefire. We want to put an end to the immediate harm, and I'm certainly not trying to suggest we shouldn't. But we also need to keep in mind the lasting harm, and the effects it has on our neighbours in Palestine and the futures they are trying to build.

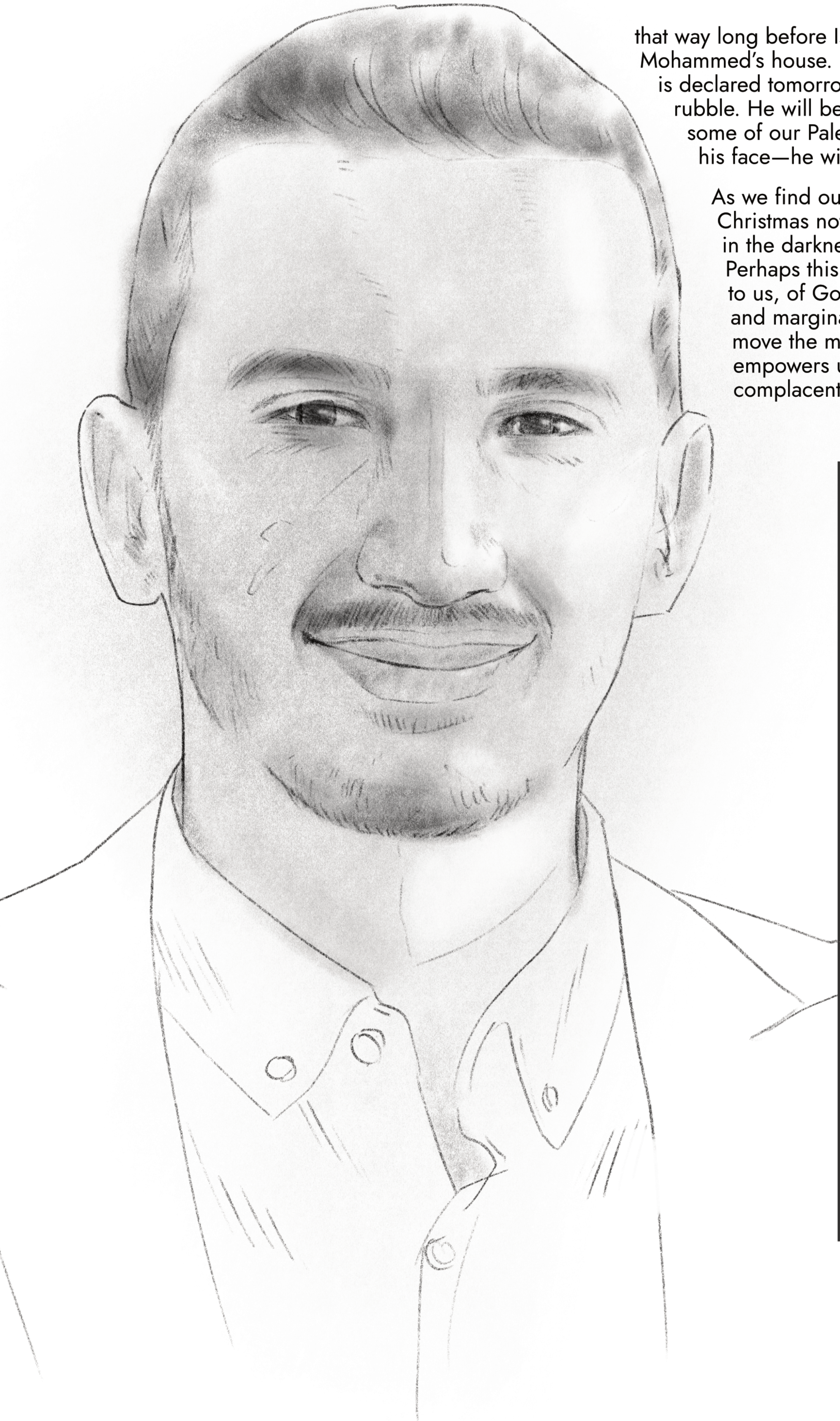
In the quote that started this installment, Mohammed laments that it was not only his physical home that was destroyed in the Israeli airstrike, but also any sense of safety and security. A year later, he recounts the dreams that still plague him each night: "Every time I closed my eyes, I was back under the rubble, choking on dust, hearing my son's faint cries and wondering if this time I wouldn't wake up."

That is the part we can't imagine. The very real sense that, even the place you felt safest, with the people for whom you've sworn protection and from whom you've found it in turn, if even that place is one bomb away from becoming your coffin, where can safety be found?

This is not an insignificant wound to start with, but a year on, with the genocide unabated, it is one that now festers in tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of our Palestinian neighbours. They cannot begin to heal from their trauma because that profound insecurity is the ironclad truth, forged in millions of pounds of explosives. As Dr. Samah Jabr, head of Mental Health at the Palestinian Ministry of Health comments in an interview with the Guardian,[4] "PTSD is when your mind is stuck in a traumatic loop. In Palestine, the loop is reality. The threat is still there."

Months ago, my mother asked me "if a ceasefire is declared tomorrow, what will you do?" I confess that, naively, I hoped for things to just 'return to normal,' not understanding that 'normal' for our neighbours in Palestine means bearing this unhealing stigmata, and it has been that way long before Israel dropped a bomb on Mohammed's house. If, by the grace of God, a ceasefire is declared tomorrow, Christ will still be under the rubble. He will be for a long time. In some ways—in some of our Palestinian neighbours in whom we see his face—he will always be under the rubble.

As we find ourselves approaching another Christmas not-like-usual, I see echoes of the tomb in the darkness of that stable in Bethlehem. Perhaps this yearly reminder of God's closeness to us, of God's identification with the oppressed and marginalized, will give us enough faith to move the mountain in front of us. I hope it empowers us to keep working—to not grow complacent—until every stone is rolled away.



Meet Your Neighbour

Mohammed is one of my favourite Palestinian writers, and he has an incredible talent for interweaving clear, facts-based reporting with the sensory and emotional realities that our Palestinian neighbours experience every day.

He has a newsletter on Substack (the same platform which hosts *Imago Palestina*), and you can subscribe right now at **MohammedMhawish.com.**

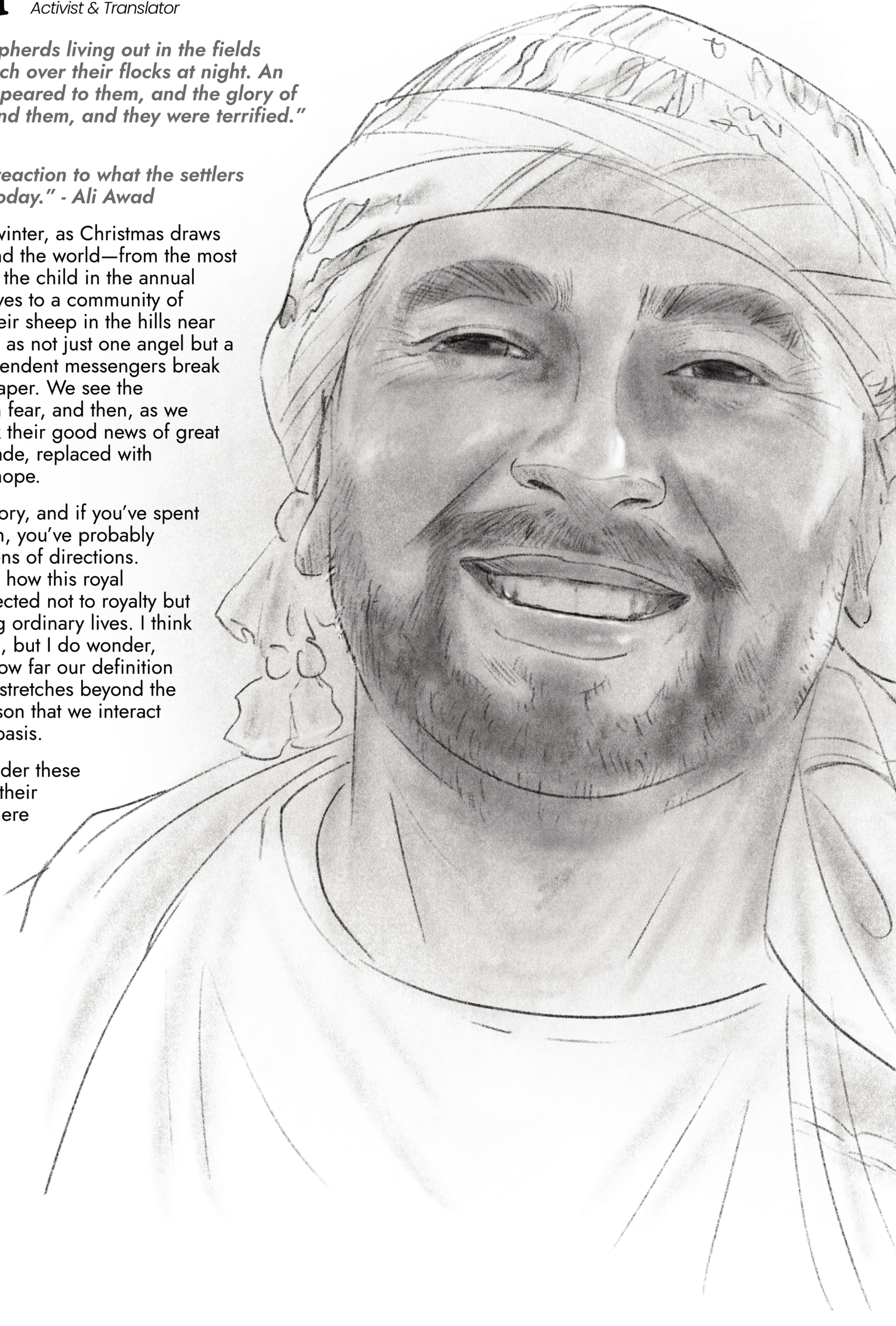
First published December 20, 2024

Ali Awad

Activist & Translator

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified." (Luke 2:8-9)

"All my life is just a reaction to what the settlers are planning to do today." - Ali Awad

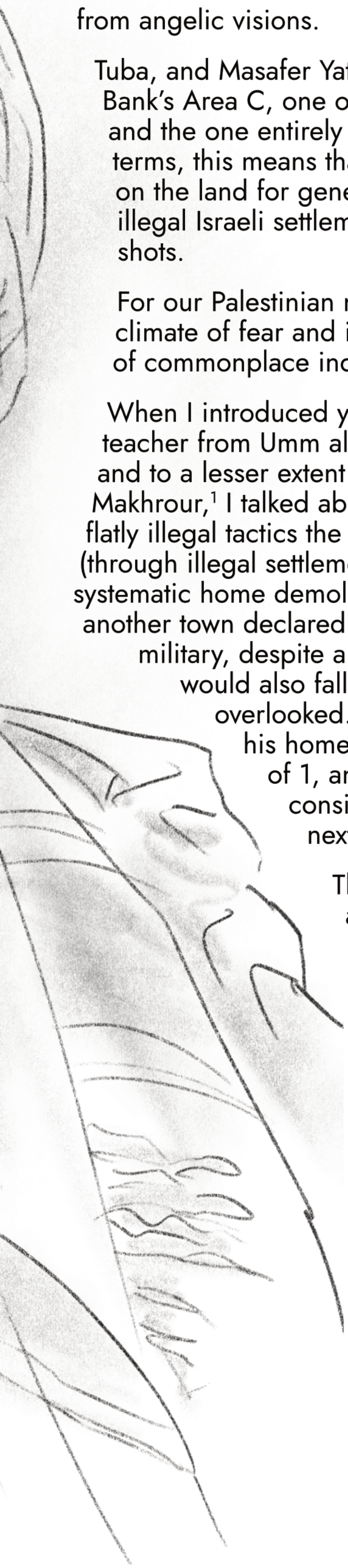


In the dark nights of winter, as Christmas draws near, Christians around the world—from the most decorated cardinal to the child in the annual pageant—turn their eyes to a community of shepherds grazing their sheep in the hills near Bethlehem. We watch as not just one angel but a whole chorus of resplendent messengers break the night like tissue paper. We see the shepherds collapse in fear, and then, as we hear the angels speak their good news of great joy, we see the fear fade, replaced with curiosity and daring hope.

It's a very evocative story, and if you've spent any time in the church, you've probably heard it taken in dozens of directions. Often, the focus is on how this royal proclamation was directed not to royalty but to ordinary folks living ordinary lives. I think this is a great reading, but I do wonder, especially this year, how far our definition of "ordinary people" stretches beyond the particular type of person that we interact with on a day to day basis.

This year, as we consider these ancient shepherds in their fear and trembling, there are real shepherds watching their flocks under those same stars, living with their own fear that is, unfortunately, far more ordinary.

I'd like to introduce you today to Ali Awad, a 26-year old activist and translator from the town of Tuba in West Bank's South Hebron Hills.



Tuba, a part of the wider Masaffer Yatta area (where our other neighbour, Awdah Al-Hathaleen lives) is a primarily agricultural community; much of its population work as shepherds and farmers, including Ali's own family. And unfortunately, Ali knows that the shepherds and farmers of Tuba have much more to fear from armed settlers than from angelic visions.

Tuba, and Masafer Yatta more broadly, are in the West Bank's Area C, one of the three West Bank partitions, and the one entirely controlled by Israel. In practical terms, this means that, while Ali's community has lived on the land for generations, the Israeli military and illegal Israeli settlements are the ones who call the shots.

For our Palestinian neighbours, this creates a constant climate of fear and insecurity, and an unending stream of commonplace indignities.

When I introduced you to Awdah Al-Hathaleen, a teacher from Umm al-Khair (also part of Masafer Yatta), and to a lesser extent when we met Alice Kisiya in Al Makhrour,[1] I talked about the underhanded and typically flatly illegal tactics the Israeli military and government (through illegal settlement) use to justify and carry out systematic home demolitions. The same is true in Tuba, another town declared a firing zone by the Israeli military, despite all the nearby illegal settlements that would also fall in this range, but are conveniently overlooked. Ali himself was first evicted from his home by the Israeli military at the age of 1, and has grown up with the consistent fear of when—not if—the next demolition will come.

The residents of Tuba are not even allowed to build fences to protect their sheep—not even allowed to stack stones on top of each other—so there are no schools or hospitals in Tuba. Even the roads are not allowed to be repaired, so Ali, as the resident connection to the other local villages, has the only car, and operates as delivery man, on-the-job-reporter, and ambulance driver for all his neighbours.

But the most potent indignities come in the nights, when Israeli settlers from the illegal settlements throughout the South Hebron Hills routinely show up to Palestinian villages to harass and even kill Palestinian flocks, destroy infrastructure such as water and power lines, and pick fights with the Palestinian shepherds.

Speaking to Alana Levinson on the most recent episode of the Unsettled podcast, Ali recounted an incident on October 22 where a young settler came to Ali's neighbour's home and began scaring his sheep, eventually attacking Ali's neighbour with a stick. After Ali began documenting the situation, Israeli soldiers arrived and pushed Ali, his 82 year old grandfather, and five others to the ground, threatening them at gunpoint. The Israeli police eventually arrived and arrested Ali and his neighbours—despite being handed video evidence of the settlers' harassment—and held them for hours before eventually admitting to their innocence.

Were we to imagine ourselves in Ali's place—the strange man screaming in the night, the guns in your face, the false arrest, the hours in handcuffs—this incident may very likely be the worst night of our lives. But for Ali and our neighbours in Tuba, it's brutally ordinary.

The thing about the ordinary is that it's very easy to overlook. That's kind of the point of the shepherds' story in the first place. We are meant to understand these Biblical shepherds as people that many—even most—would overlook. That's why it's so frustrating that I've gotta ask, despite telling this story every year, in which of our churches this Christmas will we hear prayers for the shepherds of Tuba?

All taken together, the ordinary oppression that Ali and his neighbours throughout the West Bank face has two chief results: disenfranchisement and displacement. Ali has to live his life constantly on the back foot, constantly reacting to settler attacks and arbitrary military orders; he and his family *literally* cannot build anything for themselves or their futures. And those for whom the degradation is too much find themselves with no other option than to leave their homes; often they move to the more urban Area A, where there is virtually no room for their flocks, and suddenly a lifetime of labour leaves them with no employable skills. You only have to look to our Indigenous neighbours here in Canada to see how that kind of disenfranchisement can devastate communities for generations.

This is not something we can afford to ignore. We know where injustice made ordinary leads—we're seeing it in Gaza for one thing—so we need to stand up and speak out. Break out the golden trumpets if you need to. If the angels and the shepherds can show us anything, it's that God does not overlook the kind of person that everyone else might. Breaking through stillness of the night, both carry the same message: it is vitally, life-savingly important to pay attention to that which seems most ordinary.

First published December 24, 2024

Yousef, Maryam, and Yasu

"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" *(Matthew 1:23)*

Let me tell you the story of a certain Palestinian family that's been on my mind for the past few days.

Yousef and Maryam are a young couple originally from Nazareth, but who are now displaced and living, homeless, in Bethlehem. Under the occupation, they, like many others, were issued orders to leave their home in accordance with the demands of the military. They didn't have a car, only having access to the donkey Yousef uses to haul wood for his work in construction, so they made the long and perilous trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem on foot.

Yousef's family is originally from Bethlehem, and Maryam has family in the Hebron hills, so this journey shouldn't be unfamiliar. However, in the past 76 years, the occupation has compounded the normal challenges of foot travel, and now rather than wild animals and fatigue, Yousef and Maryam's main concerns were the five military checkpoints they had to cross through on their journey, the soldiers who eyed them suspiciously with loaded assault rifles, and the settler militias who patrol the West Bank, harassing Palestinians who pass too close by their illegal settlements.

That gauntlet is, of course, not the only thing that made this journey different. No, Yousef and Maryam also had to make this journey with their son, Yasu, waiting in Maryam's womb, just moments before being born. Tonight, they will hold him in their arms, shiver against the cold, and wonder when he will see his home again. Within the year, to escape a war on children, they will join the thousands of their neighbours who now live in exile in Egypt, and that dream of return will seem farther and farther away.

I expect you can see what I'm doing here. I'm not the first person to cast this familiar family with modern faces, nor is it unique to Palestine—anywhere our neighbours are oppressed, from the ghetto of Warsaw to the cages along America's southern border, you will find the holy family . And while I'm asking you to use your imagination here, I won't go as far as to say that the neighbours I'm introducing you today aren't real. The truth is there are a thousand Yousefs, a thousand Maryams, and a thousand Yasus buried under Gaza's rubble.

At Christmas, we celebrate incarnation: the miracle of God becoming human, the poetic counterpoint to God's declaration in the beginning to make humans in God's own image. God became our neighbour and now calls us to see God's face in the faces of all humankind.

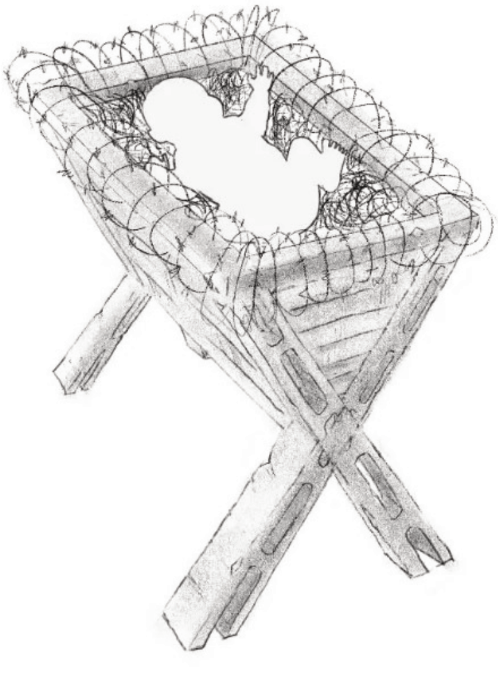
Why then are we experiencing another Christmas in a time of genocide? Why, after 444 days of constant bombardment, of starvation, of lies and spin, is Christ still under the rubble?

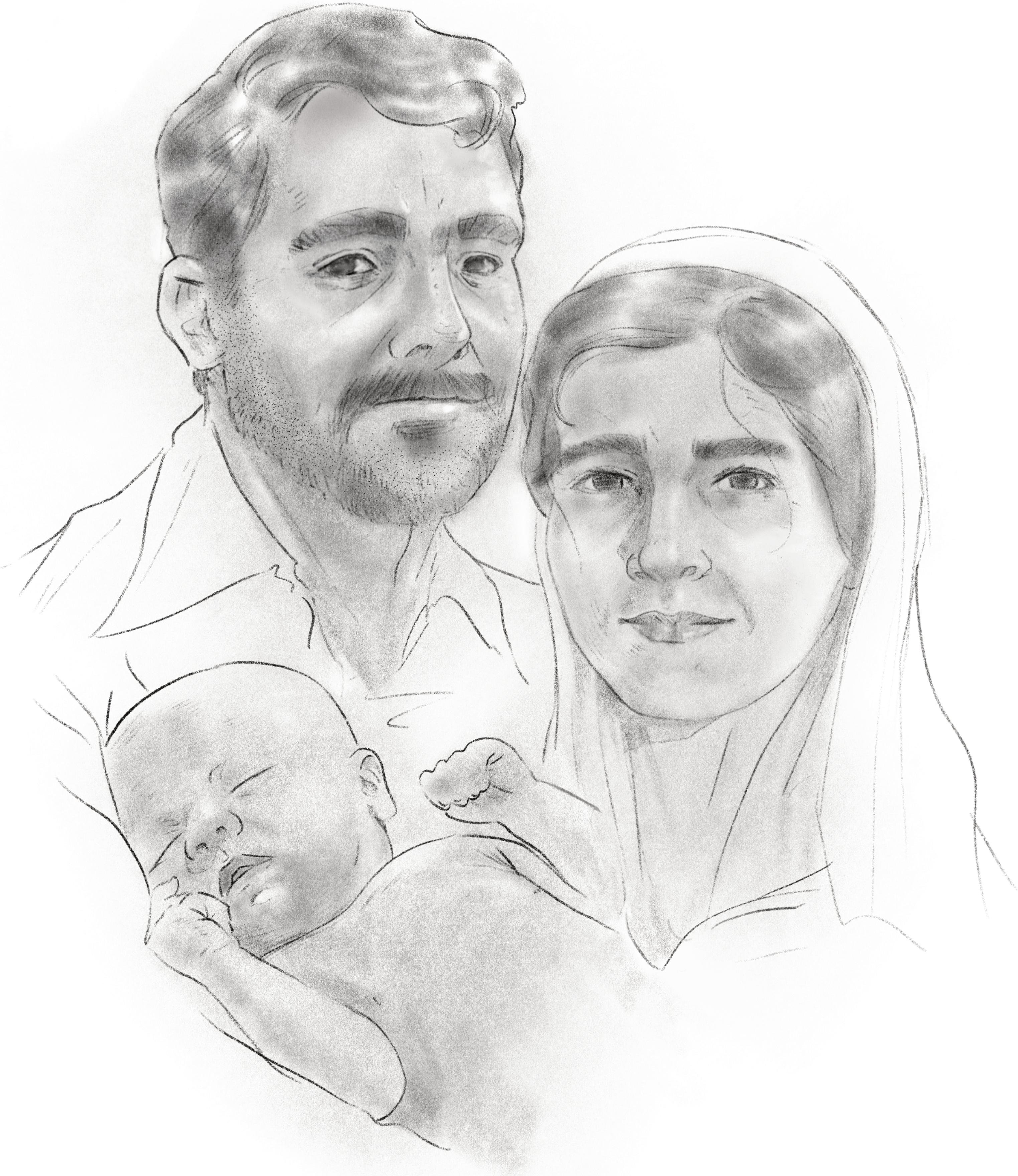
The powerful, whether in boardrooms or congress or parliament, want us to believe that Palestine is so far away. That Palestinians are so far away from us and how we live our lives. That they are faces on a screen or numbers in a casualty counter. They want us to believe in a war on terror, where people like us are being terrorized by people not like us. They want us to believe in mutual exclusivity and zero sum games and colonial borders. They want us to believe that by putting cinder blocks and barbed wire and drones on those borders, we will finally be "safe."

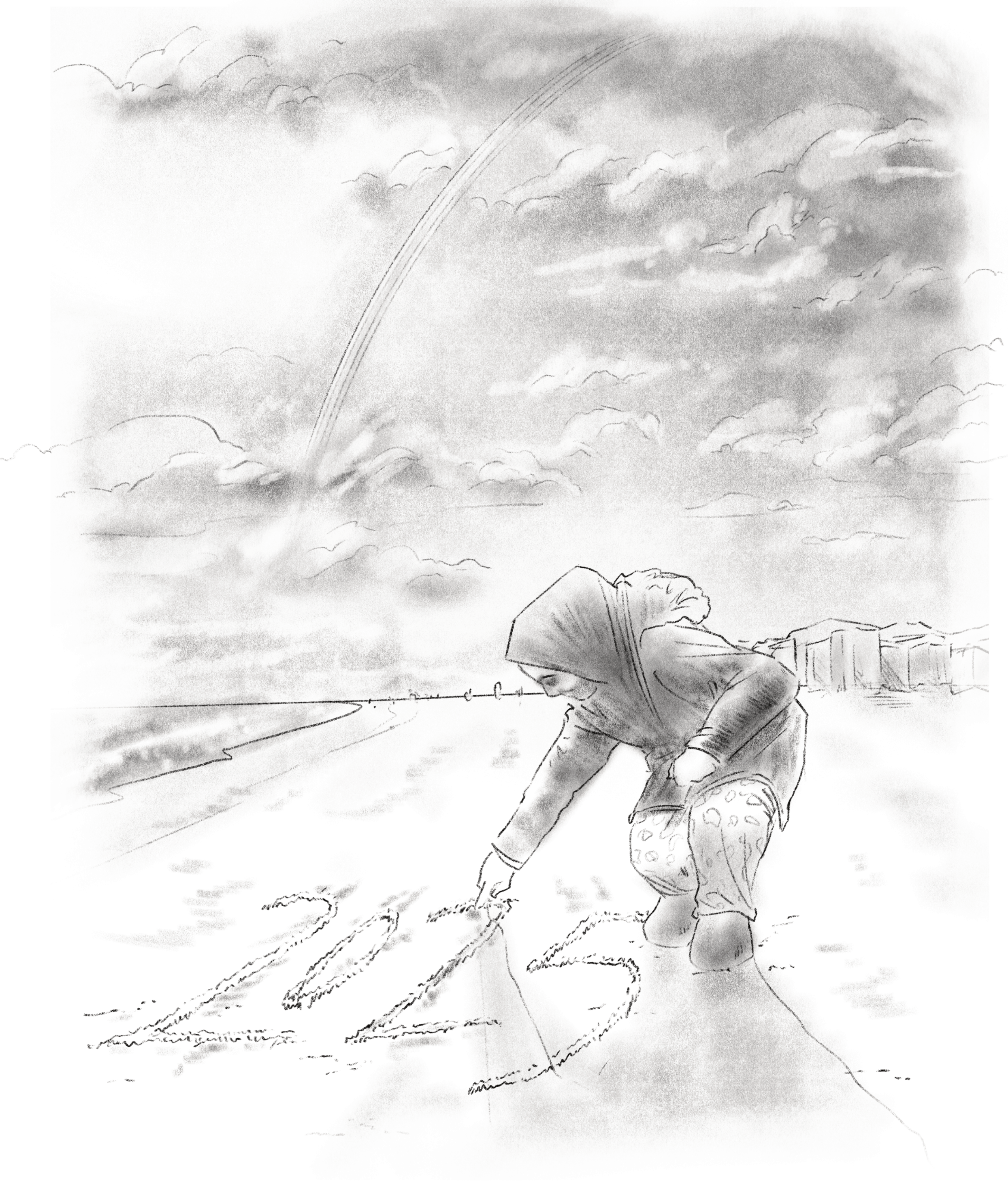
My prayer this Christmas is that we might see the truth of the incarnation all around us, and that it would make us realize how ridiculous these artificial divisions are. I pray we see Joseph in the face of the Gazan man with the GoFundMe, trying to do whatever he can to provide for his family. I pray we see Mary in the mother who faces childbirth when all of Gaza's hospitals have been destroyed. I pray we see Jesus in the child who has lost two parents and three limbs. I pray that we would understand just how connected we are, and that would move us to lament and action.

I pray that, despite the narratives of the powerful which seek to put distance between us and our Palestinian neighbours, we take inspiration from this Palestinian Jew born under occupation, who broke down barriers with his very existence, and who would throw open even the gates of Hell itself to set the captives free.

Merry Christmas, and Free Palestine.






2025

First published January 4, 2025

Lines in the Sand

"This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.'" (John 8:6-7)

It was a surreal experience, this past Tuesday evening, as I stood under waving Palestinian flags, raised voices, and fireworks, as Tuesday became Wednesday, and 2024 became 2025.

For one thing, I wasn't looking at the time, and unlike previous years where I'd be counting down with friends or family, watching the 10 go to 9 go to 8 and so on, I only knew midnight came when the explosions boomed behind me and I saw their fiery filaments reflected in the glass of the waterfront high-rise across the road. An old year dying, a new one being born—supposedly that's a huge change, but without that explosive alarm, I probably wouldn't have noticed at all.

For another, standing as I was at a rally with hundreds of other concerned neighbours, crying out against the genocide that had just rolled into its third calendar year, I found myself at an odd angle to the celebration radiating from the streets around us and booming in the sky above.

Together we screamed "no celebration until liberation," a cry we've had to repeat all too often as so much of our society remains uninterested in the suffering of our neighbours—both in Palestine and right here in our own streets, shelters, and hospitals—while all too interested with the traditional trappings of the holidays. And yet, when we chanted about our New Years Resolution being revolution, of 2025 being the year we end the genocide, of Gaza still being alive as the clock ticks over, I'd be lying if I said the energy didn't have some celebration to it.

What exactly do we have to celebrate, one may ask? Despite our efforts, the genocide has continued relentlessly, not to mention the occupation which undergirds it. The extermination of northern Gaza has only gotten worse now that Kamal Adwan hospital has been destroyed. And just a few days into the new year, Israel has already killed more than 100 people in strikes on refugee camps in Nuseirat, az-Zawayda, Maghazi and Deir el-Balah,[1] and on the al-Mawasi safe zone.[2] Realistically speaking, there is no real difference between the old year, supposedly boxed up and put to rest, and the new one, supposedly worthy of optimism and celebration—no real difference but a date on a calendar.

But something does feel different, doesn't it? Or at least it feels like it should, and maybe that's almost the same thing.

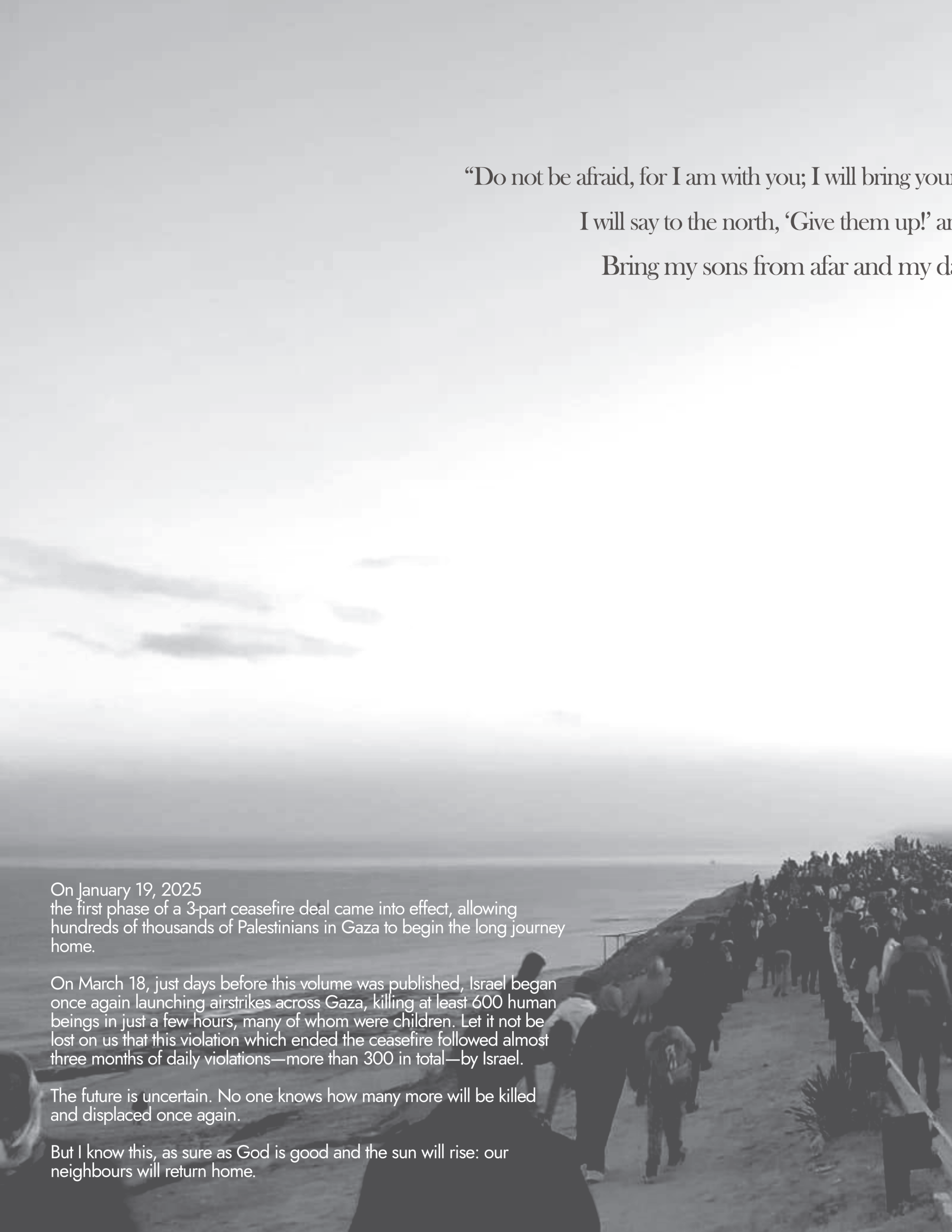
When the fireworks went off at the stroke of midnight in Toronto, Gaza had already passed into the New Year seven hours earlier; I saw the headline in an Al Jazeera liveblog as I was walking to the rally. In Gaza, just as in the streets of Toronto, our neighbours stood in that intangible doorway, looking back at the year past and forward at the year to come. In that same Al Jazeera report, I saw the photo[3] that I referenced for today's illustration. Shared with us by Gazan photojournalist Ashraf Amra (who deserves his own spotlight!), we see a woman on the beach in Gaza, wrapped in a heavy jacket against the cold. Behind her: both the makeshift camp for our displaced neighbours forced to sleep on the cold sand, and the expansive, cloud-filled sky, streaked through with a rainbow. She's leaning down, drawing lines in the sand, spelling "2025," with a smile on her face.

There may be no scientific difference between the last moment of one year and the first moment of the next, and there may be no tangible difference in the arc of the genocidal machine, but there is a difference between the old year and the new. It's a line in the sand, drawn by human fingers over and over throughout time, across the world.

We draw these lines in the sand all the time, and just because we make them doesn't mean they don't have power. We draw circles around 'here' and 'there,' insiders and outsiders—we carve out categories and then make rules, both implicit and explicit, to organize our lives into these categories. This grouping, dividing, and categorizing is a type of technology, just as real as the laptop I'm writing this on, even though it's built out of human belief and connections rather than wires and circuits. Just like any technology, drawing these lines can be very harmful—I've talked a lot about the artificial distance between us and our neighbours in Palestine, as manifested in biases in our media and in ourselves—but it can also be helpful. They help when they are drawn to include or to reflect, to call us to solidarity, or, as Christ reminds us in John, to reaffirm a shared human experience that breaks narratives of exclusion and punishment.

So, while I think it makes sense to have an uncomfortable relationship with celebrating it, I think the New Year can be one of those helpful lines. It's helpful to acknowledge the realities of the year past and take a moment to dream, hope, strategize, and set our targets for the year to come—to say loudly and clearly, "2025, end the genocide!" And it's helpful to look within ourselves and take account of our actions over the last year: what successes have we had that we need to double down on? What risky acts of solidarity have we felt ourselves pulled towards, but haven't yet built up the courage? What hope do we have for this immediate future, and what do we need to do to give that hope a real fighting chance?

If nothing else, the lines we draw in the sand beg reflection and new decisions. Whether it was midnight on New Years Eve, or on whatever average evening you're reading this, I hope you can find your line—draw it yourself if you have to. The point isn't what or when it is, just that it gives you the push, the opportunity, the excuse to change something for the better.



“Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your
I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ an
Bring my sons from afar and my d

On January 19, 2025
the first phase of a 3-part ceasefire deal came into effect, allowing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza to begin the long journey home.

On March 18, just days before this volume was published, Israel began once again launching airstrikes across Gaza, killing at least 600 human beings in just a few hours, many of whom were children. Let it not be lost on us that this violation which ended the ceasefire followed almost three months of daily violations—more than 300 in total—by Israel.

The future is uncertain. No one knows how many more will be killed and displaced once again.

But I know this, as sure as God is good and the sun will rise: our neighbours will return home.

r children from the east and gather you from the west.
nd to the south, 'Do not hold them back.'
aughters from the ends of the earth"

Isaiah 43:5-6

Photo by Rabie Hussein of Gaza

Pray
Pray

Cry Out!

Lord of **justice** we pray for justice like a rushing river, tearing down the feeble walls of oppression and watering the soil for a better world. We pray for people around the world, from the leaders in high places to those with their backs bowed in heavy labour, to rise and take courageous action to right the many wrongs inflicted on our neighbours in Palestine. We pray that we will never forget Ziad Abu Haliel, Sha'ban Al-Dalou, Yousef Abu Rabea, Mahasen Al-Khatib, Mohammed Salem, Mahmoud Almadhoun, Hossam Shabat, and all our other neighbours who have been stolen from us. We pray that we will face the forces that killed them with boldness and bring an end to all colonialism and imperialism.

Lord of **truth**, we pray for those who bear the cost of honesty, and who equip us to face a world of misinformation with courageous fact. We pray for the tireless work of journalists like Hossam, Mohammed, and Motaz who risk their lives to share the truth with us—and in the case of Hossam, pay the ultimate price for this truth. We pray for the writers, artists, and poets like Mahasen, Rabie, Marwan, and Najwan, who use beauty to puncture holes in the walls that divide us. We pray for activists like Awdah and Ali who give endlessly of themselves to support their community and document their struggles. We pray for people like Abdalrahman who reach out and build connections that span the world, and who use these skills of connection to provide for their communities. We pray even for the children, like Ahmed our little farmer, who reach out to the world to show them that Gaza deserves growth and life, not more destruction and death.

Lord of **comfort and compassion**, we pray that you would hold all our neighbours in Palestine in the safety of your wings. Be with all of our neighbours for whom trauma is a constant companion, and who have not had even a moment's respite. We pray for all held hostage by the Israeli military, like Dr. Hussam; be with him as he languishes in unjust captivity and bring him freedom by your power, even if it means shaking down the walls of the prison like you did for the Apostle Paul. We remember that he was kidnapped for refusing to abandon his patients, and so we pray as well for all other healthcare workers who are forced to make deadly sacrifices for the sake of their neighbours. In the same breath, we remember Mahmoud, who was taken from us simply for making sure his neighbours were fed. Strengthen all who continue in his stead at Gaza Soup Kitchen, and all who are inspired by his courage. May his legacy be found in all the lives he nourished.

Lord of **steadfastness and faithfulness**, we thank you for the promises you give your people. We pray with confidence for restoration and return, even amidst the most devastating destruction. We pray for people like Jood, Shahd, Motaz, and Mohammed, who have been forced to leave their homes. Walk with them as they experience the complexities of life in exile. Likewise, be with all Palestinian refugees, some of whom have lived entire lives waiting for return. Support those who support these vulnerable neighbours, like the employees of UNRWA, and Lord we pray that you spite all attempts by the Israeli government and governments around the world to disrupt this life-sustaining work.

Lord of **peace**, we pray for a peace that is greater than silence. We pray for peace in the spirit of shalom, a peace of healing and restoration and right relationships. We pray for Ziad and those like him who put their bodies and very lives in the path of violence for the sake of peace; may we never forget his sacrifice—nor the fact that he should never have had to pay it—and may his example inspire us to make the sacrifices required of us for a peace founded in justice.

Lord of **hope**, we pray for things we can't see right now and for things we can barely imagine. Grant us eyes to see your promises fulfilled and hands to work for your kingdom, here in our lifetimes. Let us see a day when all who live in the land from the river to the sea will know freedom, justice, and equity. Let the dreams of Gaza's children be the realities of our tomorrow. Give us the faith to believe it can be so.

Let Palestine be free.

y with your heart
y with your voice

Speak Up!

One of the most important things we as citizens can do for our neighbours in Palestine is to make our voices heard—and I don't just mean by voting.

We need to **call on our elected officials**. Remind them that our neighbours in Palestine deserve their rights to life and liberty just as much as the rest of us. Remind them that they have a responsibility to act decisively to end the Israeli occupation, end the current genocide in Gaza (and the unmitigated arming of Israel that's supporting it), and support Palestinian soverignty over their lands. Remind them that justice is the only way to real peace. If you're Canadian, you can find your Member of Parliament by visiting ***OurCommons.ca/Members*** and searching by your postal code. In the US you can do the same by visiting ***USA.gov/Elected-Officials***.

You can also make change by **speaking up in your local community**! Ask your **church's leaders** to pray for Palestine, combat Christian Zionism, and use the church's unified voice to speak on behalf of Palestinian freedom. You can also have **conversations with your friends and loved ones**. I know sometimes those close to us can be the hardest to talk to, but these conversations can also be the most impactful; sharing the story of one of the neighbours you just met in this issue is a great place to start!

Lastly, it's important to **raise our voices loudly and publicly**, so that all our neigbours can hear us. Over the past year, people like you and me all around the world have been taking to the streets in record numbers to march for an end to the genocide and for Palestinian freedom. Keep an eye out for when organizers like the ***Palestinian Youth Movement*** post about upcoming marches and then add your voice to the collective call for justice!

Photo by Rabie Hussein of Gaza

Organize!

If we want anything to get better for our neighbours in Palestine, we can't do it alone. Luckily, there are hundreds, thousands, even millions of people of conscience living near you who also want peace and justice, and are willing to work for it. Some organizations already doing great work, that you could connect with, include:

- **Christians for a Free Palestine**, a US and Toronto-based network of Christians across denominations working "to use our public voice and our collective power to advocate for peace, challenge Christian Zionism, and demand an immediate ceasefire." Find more info at ***ChristiansForAFreePalestine.com***. The Toronto chapter, with which *Imago Palestina* is a partner, was recently founded and is looking for more Christians to help grow solidarity north of the border—visit ***@christiansforafreepalestineto on Instagram*** for more info.

- **The Palestinian Youth Movement**, an international grassroots network of Palestinian youth and their allies working in a variety of ways to support Palestinian freedom through their communities. Learn more at ***PalestinianYouthMovement.com***, or on ***Instagram @palestinianyouthmovement***. If you're in Toronto, visit ***@pymtoronto*** on Instagram.

- **World Beyond War**, a "a global nonviolent movement to end war and establish a just and sustainable peace." It focuses on education, advocacy, and actions to bring attention to the machinery of warfare in our communities and work to disrupt it. Learn more at ***WorldBeyondWar.org***.

- **Labour For Palestine**, a Canadian coalition of workers in all sectors of life, aims to leverage our collective labour power for the sake of our neighbours in Palestine. There are over 30 different subgroups, representing different labour sectors and union spaces, so there's definitely a place for you. Learn more at ***LabourForPalestine.com***

Other great ways to organize include starting a Palestine reading group at your church (I recommend *The Other Side of the Wall* by Rev. Munther Isaac!) or getting together with other people in your neighbourhood, particularly your federal riding (if you're in Toronto, there are already riding groups you can join—check out @toronto4directory on Instagram!).

If you're having trouble getting connected, feel free to send me a message on
Instagram @svencomicsart or by email to sven@svencomics.ca.
I'd be happy to help you out!

Pray with
Pray with y

Donate!

You can donate directly to the **GoFundMe fundraisers** of four of our neighbours:

Ahmed:
gofundme.com/f/nq2v9-all-eyes-on-palestine

Abdalrahman:
gofund.me/867bf61a

Rabie:
gofund.me/012deb28

Sha'ban's Family:
gofund.me/7038b589

You can also help individual families that I haven't been able to feature yet by partnering with **Watermelon Buddies**, which was highlighted in this issue.

You can donate to **grassroots organizations** currently working on the ground in Gaza. This includes **Gaza Soup Kitchen** (*GazaSoupKitchen.org*), **Thamra** (*Thamra.org*), which were also highlighted in this issue. Other great organizations include Ele Elna Elak (EleElnaElak.org), the Sameer Project (Instagram.com/TheSameerProject), Connecting Humanity (Connecting-Humanity.org) and Crips for eSims for Gaza (CripsForEsimsForGaza.org), and Schools Without Borders (Instagram.com/Schools.Without.Borders).

You can donate to **large aid organizations** that serve our Palestinian neighbours. I typically prefer the first two options, because your money can become diluted in some large organizations, but a few with very good track records include the **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees** (aka **UNRWA**, *UNRWA.org*), which was highlighted in this issue, as well as the Palestine Children's Relief Fund (aka PCRF, pcrf.net), and World Central Kitchen (wck.org).

your hands
your feet

Photo by Rabie Hussein of Gaza

More Information

In each live update of Imago Palestina (posted on ImagoPalestina.Substack.com), I provide a handful of resources that either I used in my research or I think would be useful or interesting to you, based on the topic at hand. I've reproduced this exhaustive list below, but I also want to take a moment to highlight some particularly useful resources.

See, one of the most common things I hear folks say when I bring up our neighbours in Palestine is that "it's so complicated." While it's true that any event—any person for that matter—has universes of complexity and nuance, that doesn't mean that there isn't a lot of very accessible information to inform us, nor that certain aspects—like Israel's human rights abuses, the illegality of the occupation, or the lived experiences of our neighbours—aren't well documented and quite simple to explain.

When people say "it's so complicated," what they really mean is that they feel powerless, that they feel overwhelmed, and that they don't know who to trust. But knowledge is power, the more you learn the more confident you will feel. Here are some great, trustworthy sources to start with:

Al Jazeera News

...for up to date news coverage with reporters in Palestine

Institute for Palestine Studies

...for the leading academic resource on Palestine

B'Tselem

...for insights from an Israeli human right's group

Across the Divide Podcast

...for conversations between Palestinian Christians and their siblings in faith from around the world

The BDS Movement

...for information on the biggest non-violent response to Israeli colonialsm

+972 Magazine

...for high-quality independent journalism from Palestine-Israel

Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME)

...for policy analysis and actions Canadians can take for justice and peace

The Unsettled Podcast

...for personal stories and reporting from Jewish neighbours lifting up Palestinian voices

Jewish Currents

...for expert discussions on society and culture from a Jewish perspective, with a strong focus on Palestine

Palestinian Youth Movement

...for a network of Palestinian Youth and allies working in cities around the world for Palestinian freedom

...and these great Palestinian journalists:

Hossam Shabat *(Instagram: @hossam_shbat)*
Bisan Owda *(Instagram: @wizard_bisan1)*
Mohammed R. Mhawish *(Bluesky: @mohamhawish.bsky.social; Twtter: @MohammRafik)*
Mariam Barghouti *(Instagram/Twitter: @mariambarghouti)*

And now for all the "More Information" from each section. All sources are cited so as to be clear and easily searchable. In the cases where a source would not be easily found by searching the name and publication, I've marked that entry with a ❦ and included a QR code to the original post on ImagoPalestina.Substack.com (QR codes can usually be scanned with the pre-installed camera app on your smartphone or tablet).

Awdah Al-Hathaleen

"In Umm al-Khair, the occupation is damning us to multigenerational trauma" at +972 Magazine

"Forced from home: The daily struggle in Masafer Yatta" documentary by Doctors Without Borders

SaveMasaferYatta.com

Ziad Abu Haliel

[1]"Israeli soldiers beat renowned Palestinian activist to death in Hebron" at Middle East Eye

[2]"Israel attacks on UN in breach of international law, Harris says" at the BBC

[3]"Alice Kisiya, Defender of Al Makhrour" at Imago Palestina

[4]Social media documentation of Alice Kisiya's church in Al Makhrour, from @savelalmakhrour on Instagram

[5]"Muhammad Bhar" at Imago Palestina

"Palestinian peace activist's death brings grief to a West Bank city, and denial from Israeli forces" at The Globe and Mail

"Funeral held for Palestinian man killed in occupied West Bank" video at Al Jazeera

A short comic by Ellen O'Grady about Ziad, who she met in 2008 ❦

"CO-VIDs: the ghandi trap" video by Innuendo Studios *(not directly relevant, but more information if you're interested in philosophies behind non-violent resistance)*

Sha'ban Al-Dalou

Information from Sha'ban:

His Instagram (@shabanahmed19) *(he only has a few posts, but I'd encourage you to watch his archived stories)*

Two YouTube videos from February 2024 (about donating blood to meet the massive need) and March 2024 (about his family's tent)❦

His family's GoFundMe: https://gofund.me/7038b589 *(I don't know how much of his family is still alive to use it, but you can learn more about his story here)*

"Palestinian Seen Burning Alive in Israeli Tent Massacre Identified" at Common Dreams

"Who was Shaban Ahmed, 19-yr-old victim of Gaza tent fire?" at The Siasat Daily

"'Come out, you animals': how the massacre at al-Shifa Hospital happened" at Mondoweiss

"What is al-Mawasi and why did Israel attack a 'safe zone'?" at The Guardian

"One year of Israel's war on Gaza: Key moments since October 7" at Al Jazeera *(includes links to more information about the massacres I listed)*

Mahasen Al-Khatib

[1]"Noor Nassar, Teacher" at Imago Palestina

[2]"Awdah Al-Hathaleen" at Imago Palestina

Mahasen's Instagram (@mahasen_ktheeb)

"Palestinian Artist Mahasen Al-Khatib Killed in Israeli Airstrike on Gaza" at Hyperallergic

Munther Isaac's tribute to Mahasen ❦

Mahasen's collection at Palestinian art company Rajaeen (rajaeen.com/collections/mahasen-khateeb)

Mohammed Salem

I met Mohammed through this excellent video by Noah Samsen in which he details the event and discusses how it shows up in mainstream media outlets: "Israel struck him. People came to help. Then, they struck again." by Noah Samsen

"Video shows Israeli strike on crowd of people trying to help wounded boy" at the Washington Post *(source of both Wafaa's quote and the Israeli Military quote)*

"Survivors of north Gaza invasion report Israeli 'extermination' campaign" at Mondoweiss

"'Israel is trying to erase our presence': Palestinians say 'generals' plan' to clear north Gaza is under way" at The Guardian

"Israel/ OPT: Israel must rescind latest 'evacuation' orders for North Gaza and allow immediate, unhindered humanitarian access" by Amnesty International

"Humanitarian Situation Update #233 | Gaza Strip" at ReliefWeb

"Nine days of horror as Israeli offensive on exhausted northern Gaza intensifies" at the Guardian

Wafaa Thaher's original video of the double airstrike ❦

The Gaza Civil Defense's statement about being forced to cease operations in northern Gaza, as distributed by Gazan journalist Hossam Shabat on Twitter ❦

Drone video of Israeli military rounding up Palestinians in northern Gaza at the Indonesian Hospital, by Gazan journalist Belal Mortaja ❦

Drone video of Israeli military displacing Palestinians from Jabalia refugee camp, by Gazan journalist Hossam Shabat *(Google translation of Arabic text: "Scenes of thousands of people being forces out of Jabalia camp in the northern Gaza strip, and the fate of dozens of them is unknown")* ❦

A hub of several journalists in northern Gaza to follow, compiled by Wearthepeace ❦

Rest in Power, Yousef Abu Rabea

Bisan Owda's video reporting the killing of Yousef Abu Rabea ❦

"U.S. and Europe Suspect Israel Deliberately Pushing Palestinians Out of North Gaza, Israel Insists Otherwise" at Haaretz

"Netanyahu planning to annex, settle north Gaza as part of next phase of war: Israeli media" at The New Arab

"'Conquer, Kick Out, Resettle': At the 'Preparing to Resettle Gaza' Conference, Wishful Thinking Made Way to Concrete Plans" at Hareetz *[NOTE: I included this for some context on the very real plans being made within Israeli society to ethnically cleanse and settle in Gaza. While the reporting is…fine, the subject of the reporting and many of the quotations are very disturbing. Read with caution.]*

Jood Damo, Shahd Safi, and the Survivors

1"Dr. Refaat Alareer" at Imago Palestina

Motaz's Instagram post documenting his reunion with Jood ❦

The PCRF's Instagram post announcing Jood's evacuation on March 10th ❦

"Chicago Welcomes Jood and Ayham from Gaza for Medical Treatment" news item from the Palestine Children's Relief Fund

Landing site for the Palestine Children's Relief Fund's Treatment Abroad Program (check out more stories like Jood's) (pcrf.net/news/treatment-abroad-program-news)

Shahd's writing collected at We Are Not Numbers (WeAreNotNumbers.org/contributors/shahd_safi)

Shahd's LinkTree, which links to her other writing in various places across the internet (linktr.ee/ShahdSafiFeatures)

"Egyptian officials are demanding a massive ransom from Palestinians to escape the Gaza genocide" written by Shahd Safi at Mondoweiss

"Shahd Safi's fight to reclaim hope," an episode of the Unsettled Podcast (Oct 10, 2024) *(from which I quote Shahd)*

"Shahd Safi: "We need electricity, we need fuel, we need flour, we need bread,"" an episode of the Unsettled Podcast (Oct 31, 2023)

Abdalrahman, Rabie, and Watermelon Buddies

[1]"Nuseirat, anatomy of Israel's massacre in Gaza" at Al Jazeera

Abdalrahman's Instagram (@abdmjaber) and GoFundMe fundraiser (gofund.me/867bf61a)

Rabie's Instagram (@_rabiehussein) and GoFundMe fundraiser (gofund.me/012deb28)

Find Watermelon Buddies on Instagram (@wearewatermelonbuddies)

UNRWA

[1]"How Israel is erasing the Nakba through nature" at the New Arab

[2]EleElnaElak.org

[3]Thamra.org

[4]Watermelon Relief (@watermelonrelief on Instagram)

[5]“UNRWA: Stop Israel’s Violent Campaign Against Us” by UNRWA Director Philippe Lazzarini *[Read for free at Archive.org]*

[6]“How We Are Funded” at UNRWA

[7]“Ontario mayors ask Ford to use notwithstanding clause to clear homeless encampments” at CBC

“UNRWA is a constant reminder of Israel’s crimes. That’s why they want it gone” by Shahd Safi at Middle East Eye *(NOTE: Shahd also talks about the UN’s own guilt in the 1948 Nakba and how UNRWA, while being a lifeline, has also served to hamper Palestinian self-determination by causing state actors to focus more on aid than on supporting said self-determination. I didn’t have time to get into that here, but it’s a very important aspect of this conversation that you’d should definitely read!)*

“What does UNRWA do and why has Israel banned it from West Bank, Gaza?” at Al Jazeera

“What is UNRWA and why has Israel banned it?” at the BBC

“Israel’s outlawing of UNRWA will make life ‘unbearable’ for Palestinians” at Al Jazeera

“Israel’s parliament votes to ban UNRWA, the UN’s Palestine aid agency” at Al Jazeera

“Israel’s paradoxical crusade against UNRWA” at +972 Magazine

“Israel seizes UNRWA headquarters’ land in occupied East Jerusalem” at Middle East Eye

“UN chief appoints independent panel to assess UNRWA” at Al Jazeera

“UN completes investigation on UNRWA staff” press release by the UN

Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya

[1]“Netanyahu’s Ethnic Cleansing in Gaza Is on Display for All to See” at Haaretz [Read for free at Archive.org]’

“I will stay inside my hospital until the last moment’” at +972 Magazine

Dr. Hussam’s Instagram (@dr.hussam73)

“I’m a Pediatrician in Gaza. Please Save Us From This Horror.” by Dr. Hussam Abu Safiya at The New York Times *[Read for free at Archive.org]*

“‘Total Destruction’: No Aid Is Reaching Northern Gaza, and the Hunger Is Getting Worse” at Haaretz *[Read for free at Archive.is]*

“Palestinians will not be allowed to return to homes in northern Gaza, says IDF” at the Guardian

“Israel has deliberately made northern Gaza unlivable, say Palestinians. What comes next?” at CBC Radio

From “Free Dr. Hussam!”:

[2]Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus’ (Director-General of the WHO) post about the Kamal Adwan hospital raid, demanding the return of Dr. Hussam, posted on Twitter ❦

[3]UNICEF’s post about freezing deaths in Gaza, posted on Twitter ❦

[4]“Israel hits broadcast van killing five Palestinian journalists in Gaza” at Al Jazeera

[5]“Kamal Adwan Hospital out of service following a raid yesterday and repeated attacks since October” statement by the WHO

[6]“Gaza hospital director being held at notorious Israeli prison, say family” at The Guardian

[7]“Muhammad al-Kurdi” at Imago Palestina

[8]“Doctors launch campaign calling for release of Gaza hospital director Hussam Abu Safiya” at The New Arab

Current Update

“Dr Hussam Abu Safiya’s lawyer reveals abuse he faces in Israeli prison” video at Al Jazeera

Ahmed the Little Farmer

Ahmed’s family’s Instagram (@tasnemaaed), Facebook (facebook.com/b320013) and GoFundMe (gofundme.com/f/nq2v9-all-eyes-on-palestine)

The two videos about Ahmed at the beach ❦

Learn more about the Arms Embargo Now F-35 Day of Action at ArmsEmbargoNow.ca/f35

Learn more about the Scottish Rolls-Royce workers’ boycott in the documentary Nae Pasaran! (2018) - *Highly recommended!*

Marwan Makhoul

[1]A tweet by the National Council of Canadian Muslims criticizing MPP Lisa McLeod’s Facebook post about the Arabic song at Sir Robert Borden high school ❦

You can follow Marwan on Instagram (@marwan_makhoul) and hear his poetry on his YouTube channel (youtube.com/user/producersPO)

"Marwan Makhoul: Poetry, Prose, and Identity Politics” at The Institute for Palestine Studies

“Both Israeli and Arab, a Poet Straddles a Conflict” at Haaretz

““I thought it was beautiful” says Middle Eastern student at school facing attacks over Arabic song” article by Desmond Cole on his blog, Yes Everything!

Hossam Shabat

[1]“Al Jazeera Reporter Injured After Israel Struck Gaza Home Following Earlier Attack” at Democracy Now!

[2]Karam Abooda’s post showing Hossam, weary and Karam’s Instagram ❦

[3]Hossam’s post on Instagram, from which the ending quote was taken ❦

Hossam’s Instagram (@hossam_shbat) and Twitter (@HossamShabat)

“Video: Al Jazeera journalist injured while reporting on Israeli attack” at Al Jazeera

“Hossam Shabat From Northern Gaza: Resistance in the Time of Genocide” at The Legal Agenda (keep in mind that this was published in March 2024, so some information may be slightly out of date)

“Israel’s Genocide Day 412: Israel kills 87 Palestinians in Gaza as the ICC issues arrest warrants for Netanyahu and Gallant” at Mondoweiss [included for context]

“Volatile Emotions” podcast episode at On the Nose

Update

“Israel kills Al Jazeera and Palestine Today journalists in separate attacks in Gaza” at Middle East Eye

Najwan Darwish

Najwan's website: NajwanDarwish.com

There is a whole other essay I could have written about incarnation and a Christ-shaped symbol for solidarity, inspired by Najwan's 2023 book, Exhausted on the Cross*—in fact, I had a couple hundred words in this one on that topic that I had to cut out for clarity. I might write that one day, but suffice it to say, you should go read Exhausted on the Cross*

"Palestinian poet Najwan Darwish: 'We can't begin to comprehend the loss of art'" at the Guardian (source of introductory quote)

"Najwan Darwish interview: 'In times of genocide, poets find themselves adrift'" at The Federal

"… Until Everyone Is Free" statement by SURJ Toronto *(useful context for the quote by Fannie Lou Hamer. Like any good idea, she's not the only person who had it)*

"Najwan Darwish's "On the Third Day" (translated by Kareem James Abu-Zeid)" essay by Devin Kelly *(not strictly relevant, but I found it in my research and thought it was another very compelling discussion of solidarity in Najwan's work)*

Latinx4Palestine on Instagram (@latinx4palestine)

Mahmoud Almadhoun

[1] GSK's video on Instagram of volunteer Abu Tamer delivering food to Kamal Adwan hospital ❦

[2] GKS's video on Instagram showing the result of the November bombing of a GSK school ❦

[3] "Our northern Gaza family will feed our neighbors — until we can't" op ed by Mahmoud at the Washington Post *[Archived at Archive.is]*

[4] "UNRWA head official talks about his brother's death in Gaza" at ABC News

[5] "Kamal Adwan Hospital Director, Dr. Abu Safiya, Critically Injured by Israeli Drone Strike" at Democracy Now!

[6] "Israeli attack kills Kamal Adwan Hospital's ICU director" video at Al Jazeera

[7] "Israel bombs Kamal Adwan Hospital again, wounding 3 staff" at Middle East Monitor

[8] "Eyewitnesses in Gaza say Israel is using sniper drones to shoot Palestinians" at NPR

[9] "Gaza: Israeli army expands its use of quadcopters to kill more Palestinian civilians" at EuroMed Monitor

[10] "Gaza surgeon describes drones targeting children" at the BBC

Gaza Soup Kitchen's website (GazaSoupKitchen.org) and Instagram (@GazaSoupKitchen)

GSK's announcement of Mahmoud's death on Instagram ❦

"Israel 'deliberately kills' Gaza chef who fed the displaced" at The New Arab

"In North Gaza, a local soup kitchen tries to compensate for hunger amid dwindling aid" at NPR

"Israel bombs fleeing civilians as Kamal Adwan hospital targeted again" at Middle East Eye

"Israel Bombed Medical Supplies Delivered to Kamal Adwan Hospital — UN Confirms" at The Palestine Chronicle

Mohammed R. Mhawish

[1] "Munther Isaac Sermon in the Liturgy of Lament: Christ in the Rubble" video by Munther Isaac ❦

[2] "A year ago, an Israeli airstrike buried me alive. I'm still clawing my way out" by Mohammed R. Mhawish at +972 Magazine

[3] "Hind Rajab" at Imago Palestina

[4] "'Chronic traumatic stress disorder': the Palestinian psychiatrist challenging western definitions of trauma" at the Guardian

You can read more of Mohammed's writing at +972 Magazine, Al Jazeera, the New Arab, and on his Substack (MohammedMhawish.com). You can also follow him on Instagram (@MohaMhawish), Twitter (@MohammRafik), and Bluesky (@MohaMhawish.Bsky.Social). I cannot understate how good his writing is, nor how many vital topics he's covered

While I didn't mention it above, this year Rev. Munther Isaac has once again erected a nativity with Christ in the rubble. Read his post about it on Instagram ❦

Ali Awad

[1] "Alice Kisiya, Defender of Al Makhrour" at Imago Palestina

This installment was largely inspired by Ali's appearance on the latest episode of the Unsettled podcast, ""Ethnic cleansing by a thousand cuts": an update from the South Hebron Hills." I highly recommend checking it out; it's only 34 minutes long but there was still a lot I didn't get a chance to touch on

You can follow Ali on Instagram at @ali_awad98

"Many West Bank Palestinians Are Being Forced Out of Their Villages. Is My Family Next?" by Ali Awad at the New York Times *[Read for free at Archive.org]*

"In Masafer Yatta, activism is not a choice but a necessity" at +972 Magazine

"Ali's Story" at the Humans of Masafer Yatta Substack

Yousef, Maryam, and Yasu

Two Christmas messages from neighbours you've met before:

A message from Rabie Hussein ❦

Rev. Munther Isaac's 2024 Christmas message, "Christ is Still Under the Rubble" ❦

Infographic made by Palestinian human rights group Al-Hadaf showcasing the nativity journey as it would happen in today's Palestine. ❦

If you'd like, you can also read my Christmas message from last year, which I wasn't planning to include, but on a re-read, I think it's worth keeping in mind. ❦

A Line in the Sand

[1] "Israeli attacks kill dozens in Gaza as ceasefire talks resume in Qatar" at Al Jazeera

[2] "Gaza police chief among dozens of Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks" at Al Jazeera

[3] "Photos: Palestinians spend time on Deir el-Balah beach as year ends" at Al Jazeera

"My family's dreams for the new year amid the Gaza genocide" at Mondoweiss *(an article from a family in Gaza about the new year)*

Thank you so much for reading this volume of Imago Palestina!

Odds are,

You got this book for free

because I really wanted to introduce you to your neighbours, and I don't think there should be a price tag on that.

But there is a price on paper, and on ink, and someone's gotta pay it.

Your copy was paid for by a reader like yourself, who thought you should have the opportunity to get to know your neighbours.

If you think they made the right choice, and you want to do the same, follow this QR code to gift someone else a copy (or two, or three, or...)

svencomics.ca/product/imago-palestina-magazine-pay-it-forward/

Rest assured, no profit will be made from Imago Palestina, and all funds will go to getting our neighbours stories in front of the people who need to read them (and supporting our neighbours directly, when and where we can).

Thanks so much! :)

What does the Lord require of You?

C4
FP
TO

WE NEED TO TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER

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